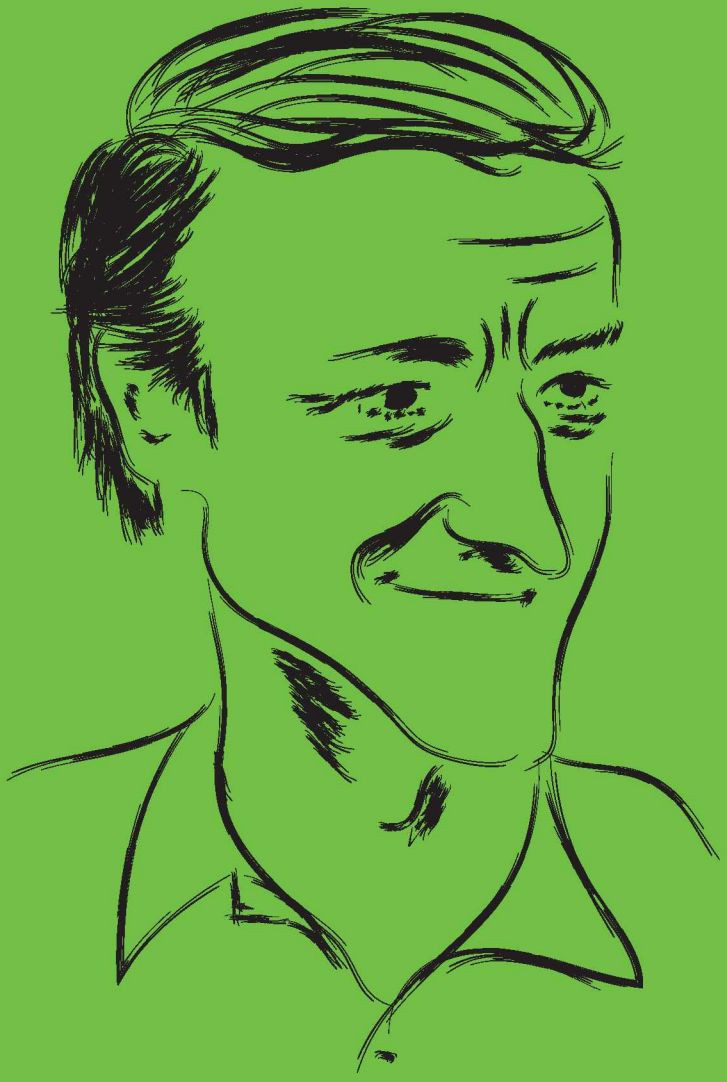
Stunned into Uncertainty

Essays on Julian Barnes's Fiction



edited by Eszter Tory ∞ Janina Vesztergom

Stunned into Uncertainty:

Essays on Julian Barnes's Fiction

ELTE Papers in English Studies

Judit Friedrich
series editor

Stunned into Uncertainty:

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Introduction

Selenelion in October

There was a special celestial event at the time this volume was being edited: a total eclipse of the moon was visible with the sun rising simultaneously, which, according to geometry, should not be possible to see. What could be seen were merely images made possible by the atmosphere around the Earth. Except, none of us involved in the production of the volume could in fact see this selenelion; it was not visible from Hungary, Poland or Britain. The perfect Barnesian metaphor: take your own shadow; cast it over what you are trying to observe; observe the resulting images until you are convinced that whatever seems to be there is merely a trick of perception; colour in the shadow by filtering light through the pollution you have contributed to; then proceed to undercut it all by irony: wait until it is all over and somebody tells you about your selenelion, since you were not there to see it yourself.

This volume of essays on Julian Barnes's fiction is the result of the collaboration of a group of doctoral students to mark the occasion of establishing a Division of Literary Studies of the Association of Hungarian PhD and DLA Students (DOSZ). The publication was supported by the University Student Union (EHÖK) of Eötvös Loránd University (ELTE), Budapest.

The contributors were students at the Modern English and American Literature Programme of the Doctoral School of Literary Studies at ELTE, studying Julian Barnes's novels and irony at a seminar course hosted by the Department of English Studies within the School of English and American Studies. The guest contributor from Poland was already known to the group as the author of an MA thesis accessible via the JulianBarnes.com website and was invited to join the volume once met in person at the 2014 conference of the European Society for the Study of English (ESSE) in Košice in September.

The authors of the essays are all exploring various aspects of modern literatures in English for their dissertations, whether to be written about British or American authors, about fiction, drama or graphic novels, in the period of the second half of the twentieth century or in recent years. As a result, the set of tools and the theoretical backgrounds mobilised for the essays are quite diverse. The points of

intersection between the contributors' respective research areas and Barnes's fiction draw a map which shows intriguing paths leading to great vistas, detours from well-travelled highways, roads with surprisingly sharp turns or trails climbing over difficult terrain.

The structure of the volume attempts to reveal converging elements within the individual articles. The opinions of the individual authors were not edited for greater coherence or harmony; references, however, are presented at the end of the volume as a combined list of all works of Julian Barnes discussed in the articles, and all critical sources mentioned by the authors in their footnotes.

In the section labelled "Abstractions," the authors focus on concepts that might enrich our interpretation of Barnes's fiction by casting a strong beam of theoretical light over a facet of individual texts, even as they explore central images.

Dorottya Jászay examines interdisciplinary theories that might explain the success of what she comes to call "supernormal simulacra" of Englishness in *England, England*, creatively and productively combining the concept of the simulacrum on the one hand and that of supernormal stimulus on the other, the latter borrowed from ethology.

Dóra Vecsernyés explores the time-bound existence of humanity and, in particular, the way time can be seen as the concept governing the narrative of *The Sense of an Ending*. Vecsernyés applies and expands the modernist concepts of time and duration to reveal the intimate similarities among the flow of time, the flow of blood and the flow of life. At critical moments, the novel offers the vision of reversibility for them, but, Vecsernyés concludes, with the final revelation Barnes reverts to the unidirectional quality we have come to expect from these flows.

Janina Vesztergom finds an abstract treatment of responsibility in *Arthur & George*, a key to explaining the success of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle as a novelist, which comes at the expense of his failure as a detective fashioned after the fictional character of Sherlock Holmes he himself had created. The dialogic nature of this novel is explored here on several levels, from the textual through the structural to the ontological, while the exploration itself is presented along the division between intrapersonal and interpersonal responsibilities.

In the "Anxiety" section, the authors concentrate on one of the core human experiences presented in Barnes's fiction around questions of identity: the anxiety generated by the attempt to define the position of humankind in general, and the place of the ambitious individual in

particular, within the world of all living beings, in the context of politics or in terms of literary traditions.

Eszter Szép, who takes a fundamentally visual approach to literature, presents the anxiety Barnes projects on humans in contrast with animals. This is the anxiety of imagining what we would look like being seen from the outside, for instance in the eyes of animals, as in *A History of the World in 10½ Chapters*. Szép uses the approach of a fairly new area, Critical Animal Studies, and relies mainly on John Berger and Jacques Derrida for theoretical support.

Ágnes Harasztos is interested in the representation of Eastern and Central Europe in British fiction. For her, *The Porcupine* is a natural choice. In this article Harasztos explores the political anxiety surrounding liberalism. According to her argumentation, liberalism requires a background of authoritarian politics, against which it can emerge and which then stays internalised in it. Harasztos brings together questions about father-son relationships and political succession with the political issue of how liberalism may or may not develop against a background of a collapsing totalitarian state, examined via the process of the emergence of the self as described by Jacques Lacan.

Péter Tamás explores the anxiety of literary influence in *Flaubert's Parrot* in terms of Harold Bloom's *The Anxiety of Influence*. Tamás takes the stance that it is not so much the direct influence but the misreading of Flaubert that could be an interesting focus of analysis. In his view, it is not Barnes but Geoffrey Braithwaite who is affected by the pains of trying to grow into an independent author from under the shadow of a genius. Within this framework, the most promising path to success for Braithwaite is to prove to himself that Flaubert was not as good as everybody else seems to think, and, if Flaubert is found weak, there is space for Braithwaite to grow into an author. Braithwaite's greatest anxiety would be to become a character in Flaubert's works, reverting the direction of ontological passage and moving down the diegetic ladder which he attempts to traverse upward, towards authorship.

The closing cluster of essays is arranged in the "Ascendance" section around explorations of human yearnings for transcendence traceable in Barnes's work around concepts such as religion, art, love or national identity and the relentless human pursuit of meaning that urges the characters to use any or all of these concepts in trying to make sense of the limited opportunities human life offers.

Wojciech Drąg, our guest contributor invited from Wrocław, Poland, addresses the quest for meaning as explored through art,

religion and love in *Flaubert's Parrot*, *Staring at the Sun* and *A History of the World in 10½ Chapters*, respectively.

Eszter Tory, in contrast, claims that there is a suppressed desire for the transcendental in Barnes's works. Tory argues that *Staring at the Sun*, far from being simplistic, plays upon the tension it creates by exploring various attitudes towars religion, mostly negative, and characters who are yearning for something more than the quotidian and are "stunned into uncertainty" by the everyday miracles of life forms around us. Tory claims that in spite of the professed lack of any religious faith in the characters, there is a desire in the text itself towards the transcendental.

Miklós Mikecz in his essay that concludes this collection shows how Barnes offers us the image of the gentle fall of the woman in *England, England*, an image thoroughly inauthentic yet rising to the status of a symbol promisig delivery, if not divine grace.

The arch of the articles in the volume does not represent the chronological order of Barnes's works, but it does pick up on notes struck in the various pieces and constructs a melody, perhaps even some harmony, unique to the moment of observation as experienced by the authors in Eastern and Central Europe, with their sights kept steadily on English literature.

The last section of the volume is a more light-hearted attempt at defining significant characteristics of Julian Barnes's writing. Each of us contributed a one-page definiton of "The Barnesian Text," to be written without references, produced without much deliberation and submitted without the author's name specified. As it turns out, the definitions were quite different and addressed a range of issues, taking various approaches, so that the occasional repetition seemed either an emphasis of actual features of the Barnesian text or a result of the growing cohesion of the group as a whole. In the end, a kaleidoscopic collection of definitions seemed a better way to present these texts than a cumulative, merged document. The author's names are now attached, below the texts rather than above, to indicate that the emphasis this time was less on scholarly performance and more on the spontaneous expression of reactions and hunches, as well as informed opinions.

The danger is, however, that if we are in the line of light, we might obscure what we are trying to observe by casting our long shadows over the very object of scrutiny. This October's selenelion was a perfect Barnesian metaphor: humans trying to watch a breathtakingly

beautiful, eerily unusual celestial phenomenon that is not really there, while blocking the light of the sun and enjoying the colours that remained filtered through the atmosphere of the Earth. For lunar eclipses, when the Earth, the moon and the sun are perfectly lined up, our point of observation is, by necessity, the cause of darkness; our object of observation will be obscured by the shadow we cast in our temporary position between the sun and the moon. It is only the image of the lunar eclipse and the sunrise that we can see, even though the moon has already set and the sun has not yet risen, as Earth has an atmosphere that bends light, and is filled with debris filtering colours until red and brown will be the only ones left to be seen.

The working title of this Introduction was "A Suicide Note," a choice primarily motivated by the circumstances of the production of the volume. A reach for the impossible, trying to get funding for the publication of the essays, seemed quite a desperate gesture at the time, with publication opportunities oscillating with disconcerting speed between states of utter hopelessness and immediate need for completion.

The phrase that became our title is originally from *Staring at the Sun*. It describes Jean's reaction upon visiting the Grand Canyon on a trip during which she spent her time contemplating the certainty of death. Expecting disappointment, not interested in verbal descriptions and almost calling off the excursion entirely, Jean is stunned into uncertainty by the view. The last of the Seven Wonders of the World she visits, the one provided by nature rather than erected by man, gives her a view of natural magnificence but also a view of the impossible: she sees an aeroplane flying lower than she is standing, as if flying underground.

If we imagine looking back at ourselves from a yet unimaginable future, we may see things differently. Perhaps, even as we are looking now, we might find ourselves stunned into uncertainty by the everyday miracles, like a book published or a degree finished, and all the work that is given freely to create the miracle. Coming up with an idea. Offering the time. Unearthing funding. Generating the enthusiasm to continue after losing funding. Watching a classful of doctoral students setting up a conference, drawing the posters, delivering the papers, writing the articles, doing the editing. Inviting help form further afield, accepting the gifts of layout, book cover, editing assistance, language supervision.

Moments of grace, a fall arrested, landing becoming gentler – moments never left undercut by irony in a book by Julian Barnes, but moments presented nevertheless. Light reflected from its source, mostly blocked by ourselves, falling on what we try to observe, creating beautiful images of what is not yet, or is no longer, there.

Judit Friedrich CSc.
series editor

Abstraction

Dorottya Jászay

"Supernormal Simulacra"

The Relation of the Human Psyche and the Theme Park Phenomenon in Julian Barnes's *England, England*

> … theme parks and corporate practice have been accused of: sexism, racism, conservativism, heterosexism, andro-centrism, imperialism (cultural), imperialism (economic), literary vandalism, jingoism, aberrant sexuality, censorship, propaganda, paranoia, homophobia, exploitation, ecological devastation, anti-union oppression, FBI collaboration, corporate raiding and stereotyping.
>
> Eleanor Byrne and Martin McQuillan, *Deconstructing Disney*

Two excellent young British theoreticians, Eleanor Byrne and Martin McQuillan, compiled this list[1] in their book *Deconstructing Disney* (1999), in which they draw a rather negative picture of theme parks. Why, then? Why are humans unnaturally attracted to Disneyland, to kitschy wax museums, enchanted castles, or even re-built eighteenth-century fishing villages? The answer seems complicated, to say the least.

In what follows, I wish to interpret the phenomenon of (mainly the American type of) theme parks and human reactions to them through investigating Julian Barnes's *England, England*[2] (1998), in which he recreates, refreshes and reconceptualises foggy Albion in the form of a theme park on the Isle of Wight. In the novel, the aging business mogul Sir Jack Pittman wishes to create, as a final project, a masterpiece, his "Ninth Symphony" (43), a completely "authentic," condensed theme park incorporating everything which is stereotypically "English."

1. Qtd. in Sean Cubitt, *Simulation and Social Theory* (London: SAGE, 2001), p. 99.
2. All parenthesized references are to this edition: Julian Barnes, *England, England* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1998).

Critics often characterise this novel of Barnes as a "utopia or merry dystopia,"[3] while the writer himself considers it primarily a "political novel."[4] Indeed, the political aspect is markedly present in the book; however, I wish to analyse it in a slightly more complex way. On the one hand, I will focus on the philosophical and socio-anthropological theories of Guy Debord and Jean Baudrillard concerning the "simulacrum phenomenon" and hyperreality. On the other hand, my analysis will rely on examinations in evolutionary biology, psychology and neurology, principally concerning the so-called "supernormal stimuli," examined as early as the 1930s (including the experiments of Nikolaas Tinbergen) and described more recently in the experiments of V.S. Ramachandran and Deirdre Barrett. I would like to connect simulation theory with the concept of supernormal stimuli and prove that when we examine the theme park phenomenon, we basically witness the interaction of two aspects of its effect: a sociological and a psychological aspect.

In what follows, I would like to prove that *England, England* is one of Barnes's most complex novels, even though it is also considered by some to be the least typical of his books. What may be stated safely is that this novel has great theoretical potential and may be interpreted based on a wide spectrum of theories or entire fields of discipline such as anthropology, semiotics, sociology or even evolutionary psychology and addiction studies.

Simulacra and Simulation by Jean Baudrillard, French post-structuralist philosopher and sociologist, certainly had a great influence on Barnes's novel. Baudrillard's figure and the theories from his 1981 book actually appear in *England, England* in the character of the French intellectual, who appraises the project in his short but concise presentation. Although Baudrillard is surely not the first theoretician to discuss the concept of simulation, probably he is the one whose vehemence and persuasive style are the most memorable. Baudrillard adopts and improves the ideas of his contemporary French fellow theorists such as the Marxist Guy Debord, whose book *The Society of the Spectacle* (1967) precedes Baudrillard's *Simulacra and Simulation* by a good fifteen years. However, if we would like to find the origins of simulacrum theory, we must go further back in history, as Sean Cubitt explains in his work *Simulation and Social Theory*:

3. Vanessa Guignery, *The Fiction of Julian Barnes: A Reader's Guide to Essential Criticism*, Readers' Guides to Essential Criticism (Basingstoke; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), p. 108.

4. Guignery, p. 104.

> reality has been a profound challenge to human thought since its first recorded stirrings. The very earliest writings we have, from Ur, in the Vedas and Egyptian papyri, already lament the ephemerality of life's pleasures. […] we hear […] how our forebears fell to cursing reality's cruelty. By the time Socrates drained his cup of hemlock, 399 years before the birth of Christ, the idea that the familiar world we see about us is doomed to disappear had spawn a new belief: that there exists some realm beyond the visible, a world of permanence, home either to immortals or to immortal ideas.[5]

Actually, Plato, the famous disciple of Socrates, would also be a good point of departure, as he writes about the concept "*eidolon* which is frequently translated in the Latin style as simulacrum."[6] This idea, however, is brushed aside by Barnes himself in an interview where he claims that "there is indeed a reference to Plato in *England, England* but it's a schoolroom reference, it's what we all remember of being told about Plato, rather than tipping off the reader that Plato is the palimpsest behind this particular novel."[7]

The most beneficial strategy would probably be to pick up the line at Guy Debord and look at how he describes the "spectacle" in *Society of the Spectacle*, and then consider how, almost twenty years later, Baudrillard imports and develops the concept of spectacle into his theory of "simulacrum" and how he coins the term "hyperreality" at the same time. What Debord says is basically that the material object gives way to its representation as sign and that reality itself has been turned into an imitation of itself. Reality rises up with the spectacle, and the spectacle is real. Debord says that to be represented at all is to become spectacular; the whole of human life is spectacularised, including lived reality.[8] What is markedly different in Debord's early work and Baudrillard's simulacrum theory (as well as Debord's late works such as *Comments on the Society of the Spectacle*, published in 1988) is that Debord still presupposes some kind of reality behind or before the spectacle; he still claims that there is "a residual reality, against which the perversion of the spectacle could be measured."[9]

5. Cubitt, pp. 1–2.
6. Cubitt, p. 2.
7. Vanessa Guignery and Ryan Roberts, eds. *Conversations with Julian Barnes* (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 2009), p. 49.
8. Cubitt, pp. 29–37.
9. Cubitt, p. 42.

Baudrillard, however, radically denies the importance of the "real" behind the simulation, claiming the primacy of the simulacra and the perishing of the real. In *Simulacra and Simulation*, with its tripartite signification system of simulation, he claims that "today abstraction [...] is the generation by models of a real without origin or reality: a hyperreal."[10] He radically denies the existence of reality and affirms that what we are talking about is the "substitution of the signs of the real for the real."[11] In his system, image or sign takes the place of the real; what happens is basically the disappearance of the signified from behind the signifier. This theory more or less coincides with what Sir Jack declares in a quite cynical remark right at the beginning of *England, England*, when he muses on his project:

> 'What is real? This is sometimes how I put the question to myself. Are *you* real for instance – you and you?' [...] 'My answer would be No. Regrettably. And you will forgive me for my candour, but I could have you replaced with substitutes, with ... simulacra, more quickly than I could sell my beloved Brancusi. Is money real? It is, in a sense, more real than you. Is God real? That is a question I prefer to postpone until the day I meet my Maker.' (31)

Mark Poster, an editor and enthusiast of Baudrillard's works, commented in his introduction to Baudrillard's *Selected Writings* on the phenomenon of the simulacrum as follows: "a simulation does not only represent absence as a presence, it also undermines any contrast to the real, absorbing the real within itself [...] hyperreality, a world of self-referential signs."[12]

In Barnes's *England, England*, we may observe something very similar in the project of Sir Jack, in the building of a new, improved England for tourists. In the novel everything eventuates what Baudrillard describes: the real falls out from behind the simulacrum, England, England takes over the place of "old" England, and in the form of a dystopia we see first the decline, then, finally, the total annihilation of the original, the real. "Umberto Eco employs the term hyperreality to invoke what he understands as those culturally specific situations in which the copy comes first, whereas for Baudrillard it corresponds

10. Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, trans. Sheila Faria Glaser (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994), p. 3.
11. Baudrillard, *Simulacra*, p. 4.
12. Baudrillard, *Simulacra*, p. 6.

to that altogether more general contemporary condition in which both representation and reality have been replaced by simulacra."[13] This is what happens to England, England: as the "real" England slips out from behind it, the Isle becomes a sheer copy, a signifier without a referent, a simulacrum in itself.

This idea is ironic in itself, and if we look closer, we see that the process is ironic as well. What we usually understand as irony is the abyss between the intended and the pronounced meaning, which meanings may be replaced by the signifier and the signified. Signification in itself is always already an ironic phenomenon because of the arbitrary relationship between the signifier and the signified. What appears in the novel, however, is more complicated than this. The abyss in irony, the abyss between the signifier and the signified, is the same abyss that is generated between England, England and "old" England. Yet, in this case the process goes even further in that the signified disappears from behind the signifier.

From this line of thought an obvious reference might arise to Jacques Derrida, Baudrillard's contemporary and one of the most important thinkers of the post-structuralist era. The concept of the supplement that he expands in his work *Of Grammatology* (1967) argues for the lack of authenticity and the lack of the originary. In *England, England* Dr Max denies the possibility of pointing out the authentic being and beginning of something, just like Derrida claims that we merely have "the impression of the thing itself, of immediate presence, or originary perception. Immediacy is derived. Everything begins with the intermediary."[14] The phenomenon that Derrida describes when he is elaborating on the concept of the supplement is precisely what Baudrillard and what *England, England* claim: when "one wishes to go back from the supplement to the source: one must recognise that there is a supplement at the source."[15] This idea is highlighted in the novel again by Dr Max when he says: "What we are looking at is almost always a replica […] There is no prime moment" (132). If we compare this to what Baudrillard says, the similarity is undeniable: "The very definition of the real is that of which it is possible to give an equivalent reproduction. At the end of this process of reproducibility, the real is

13. Nick Perry, *Hyperreality and Global Culture* (London: Routledge, 1998), p. 1.

14. Qtd. in Jonathan D. Culler, *On Deconstruction: Theory and Criticism after Structuralism* (London: Routledge, 1983), p. 105.

15. Qtd. in Nicholas Royle, *Jacques Derrida*, Routledge Critical Thinkers (London: Routledge, 2003), p. 51.

not only that which can be reproduced, but *that which is always reproduced*: the hyperreal."[16]

What happens to England, England, however, is not simply simulation. It is the simulation, abstraction and concentration of everything that is generally considered to be English, according to an international marketing research analysis conducted at the beginning of the project. The density of the stimuli is extreme; Buckingham Palace, Big Ben, Tower Bridge, and even Robin Hood and his Merrie Men, that is, the theme park created by Sir Jack, accommodate the demands of modern consumers: they perfectly serve the increased stimulus-threshold of contemporary society. Even "warm-hearted [English] hospitality" is re-learned, claiming that "by being learned, it will be the more authentic" (108). Gerda Reith in her book *The Age of Chance* (1999) quotes de Jong when she writes that

> the problem of boredom is intrinsic to modern society, and has its roots in the nineteenth century when the breakdown of the sense of a metaphysical order gave birth to the distinctive feature of the modern age – the syndrome of intensity. The desire to experience intense sensation replaced the pursuit of meaningful activity and had its converse the existence of apathy and boredom.[17]

This is what all theme parks aim to achieve: they wish to satisfy the need for intensity and even wish to exceed visitors' expectations.

The root of all these phenomena lies in consumerism and mass production. As Cubitt also notes, "in the twentieth century, a new phenomenon emerged: consume, or be damned."[18] Debord already connects the concept of the spectacle to consumerism when he claims that "the initial task of the spectacle is to encourage consumption."[19] Walter Benjamin describes this problem of the modern age as follows: "Now things press too closely on human society. […] the sheer proximity of things, and especially commodities, debars us from taking the necessary step back."[20]

16. Jean Baudrillard, *Symbolic Exchange and Death*, trans. Iain Hamilton Grant (London: SAGE, 1993), p. 73.
17. Gerda Reith, *The Age of Chance: Gambling in Western Culture* (London: Routledge, 1999), pp. 130–1.
18. Cubitt, p. 5.
19. Cubitt, p. 39.
20. Walter Benjamin, *One-Way Street and Other Writings*, trans. Edmund Jephcott and Kingsley Shorter (London: NLB, 1979), p. 89.

The need for exaggeration has always been present in society. With the building of capitalism and the rise of intense consumerism and consumer society, exaggeration has reached astounding proportions. We experience a straining and pushing of the stimuli-threshold: what we want is always more, sooner (if not immediately), and we want it to be as astonishing as possible, with the least amount of energy invested, of course. This refusal of energy investment is something that Barnes refers to in an interview, while also incorporating it in the book verbatim, when he claims that "the point is not quite that we prefer the replica to the original, but that we prefer the convenient replica to the inconvenient original."[21] This is what Gerda Reith describes in the aforementioned quotation: we need denser, more stimulating and more intense impact in order to have our attention grabbed. This is also what Baudrillard speaks about at the very beginning of *Simulacra and Simulation*, when he describes the map as a compression and minimalisation of reality: the map is merely abstraction, and there is no real flavour in it; it is rather an empty concept, not an intensive experience. It is empty and intensive at the same time, and this density is also what is achieved in the creation of England, England.

The stimulating, intense environment, however, is not exclusively the result of consumer society, fast technological development and mass production. To the intense stimuli of the fast-changing Western world another factor is needed, since the external impact would be pointless without the proper substrate. This is the point where the susceptible brain and the biological and psychological coding of humans enter the equation because, according to Cubitt, "culture is based in the biology of the human organism."[22] This thought is one of the key concepts underlying my paper: it will shed light on the behavioural patterns of humans concerning mass production, the increase in the stimuli-threshold and the extreme attraction to theme parks. To find some answers, we have to go back to the 1930s, to the experiments of the Dutch Nobel laureate ethologist Nikolaas Tinbergen. Tinbergen found that "song birds abandoned their pale blue eggs dappled with gray to hop on black polka-dot Day-Glo blue dummies so large that the birds constantly slid off and had to climb back on."[23] While conducting his experiments, Tinbergen coined the term "supernormal stimulus" in order to explain this ethological phenomenon.

21. Guignery and Roberts, p. 61.

22. Cubitt, p. 19.

23. Deirdre Barrett, *Supernormal Stimuli: How Primal Figures Overran their Evolutionary Purpose* (New York: Norton, 2010), p. 13.

While Tinbergen conducted experiments with animals only, for Vilayanur S. Ramachandran, an Indian neurologist, nestling birds and sticklebacks were not enough. He extended the experiments by examining the behaviour of herring gulls feeding their chicks in parallel with the reaction of the human brain to various representations of the human body throughout the history of art. However surprising it may seem, Ramachandran firmly states that "people rarely create images of the body that are realistic."[24] He proceeds by examining a twenty-five thousand-year-old statue, the Venus of Willendorf, explaining the need of the early humans to exaggerate some of the features of the woman for the statue while completely ignoring some others. He says "the brains of the hunter-gatherers who made the Venuses were pre-programmed to exaggerate what mattered most. […] When it comes to the images of the body, we are driven not just by culture but also something we thought existed only in the earliest humans. It is the primeval instinct to exaggerate."[25] What he does is basically connecting animal behaviour to human instincts and points out something that is crucial in my analysis: the instinct to exaggerate is "hard-wired into the brains of humans, even if in some cultures it was suppressed."[26] Just like in *England, England* or in simulation theory, people twenty-five thousand years ago "were hankering after something more human than human, more real than real."[27] Although in his experiments Ramachandran only dealt with the reaction of the brain to the various representations of the human body, this is the line which the psychologist Deirdre Barrett picks up and develops further in her 2010 book *Supernormal Stimuli: How Primal Urges Overran the World*. Barrett takes the previous experiments to an even higher level: she examines supernormal stimuli in a twenty-first-century context through characteristically contemporary social problems such as obesity or pornography. From her research it seems that not only do we insist on exaggeration in arts, especially body representations, but we are looking for it and strive to find it basically in all other fields of life as well. In her investigations we finally get a combination of simulation theories, consumerism and mass production, from which we can extrapolate towards the various kinds of theme parks and, of course, to the phenomenon of England, England. Barrett highlights a crucial distinction between animals and

24. "More Human than Human," *How Art Made the World*, BBC (United Kingdom: 2005), television.
25. "More Human than Human."
26. "More Human than Human."
27. "More Human than Human."

humans in terms of supernormal stimuli. She says that while "animals encounter supernormal stimuli mostly when experimenters build them, we humans can produce our own."[28] In an interview on her book she explains: "now that humans become so technologised, we are able to create our own supernormal stimuli to cater for our instincts, and our instincts pull toward exaggeration."[29] And this is exactly what happens in *England, England*.

To avoid misunderstanding, we must state that the concept of supernormal stimuli and simulacrum theory are not merely in my discussion of the theme park because we see exaggerated, distorted reality or because what we see are copies of the original buildings and sights. The theories are connected because of the density of the stimuli that the simulacrum of the theme park offers. If we consider, however, Sir Jack's little hobby that he pursues once a month in the house of his Auntie May, we find that it is something that can be classified as an eminent example of the human creation of objects to answer the need for supernormal stimulus, in this case for pornography. For Barrett, pornography is a key element among supernormal stimuli. She says that some people, in fact, even favour "porn when a real-life partner is available,"[30] and indeed we only see Sir Jack venerating his habit: there is no sign of a healthy relationship. It seems that he devotes his whole life to fulfilling his need for supernormal stimuli, which he carries out by generating and living among flawlessly produced simulacra. The giant doll's house is just as constructed and absurd as his project England, England, just as perverted and pathological. We may laugh at the goose who tries to roll a volleyball back to its nest or at the bird which tries to sit on a huge, fake, polka-dotted egg, but what we do in our modern consumer society is not actually any more advanced than what these animals do. Probably, it is even worse, as we produce supernormal simulacra for ourselves.

In fact, what Barrett also notes in her book is that supernormal stimuli used to be immensely useful to human beings, well, at least a couple of thousand years ago. Today, however, these instincts dominate us and we gladly venerate them, especially now that we can actualise almost all fantasies, nearly anything that the need for supernormal stimuli generates in us. Barrett says that the concept of supernormal stimuli "is the single most valuable way that ethology can help us

28. Barrett, p. 4.

29. "Supernormal Stimuli," *For Good Reason*, accessed 25 April 2010 <http://www.forgoodreason.org/deirdre_barrett_supernormal_stimuli>, podcast.

30. Barrett, p. 32.

understand the problem of modern civilisation."[31] She quotes evolutionary psychologists Leda Cosmides and John Tooby when she utters a key sentence: "Our modern skulls house a stone-age mind."[32] This is also probably the explanation why England, England as a system, a perfect heap of simulations, starts to devour itself at the end. The buildings and habits in England, England are carefully selected in a way that visitors can react to them in a pre-planned manner so that their need for supernormal stimuli may be satisfied in the most efficient manner. All the adventures and sights are adapted to the stimuli-threshold of the modern visitor; in England, England we experience England with over-exaggeration and gross simplifications. As Dr Max highlights, "patriotism's most eager bedfellow was ignorance, not knowledge" (82). Alternatively, we may also quote Jeff, the Concept Developer: "'So we don't threaten people. We don't insult their ignorance. We deal in what they already understand [...] people won't be shelling out to *learn* things [...] They'll come to us to enjoy what they already know'" (71). The visitor is presented a world which indeed lines up the most familiar sights of England, but in a reinterpreted way, due to the human need for supernormal stimuli. From this we see that in this novel, and I think I can extrapolate and claim that in every theme park, simulation and supernormal stimuli are inseparable.

I would like to quote Barrett again, citing a sentence, or rather instruction, which she also quotes, this time from the American philosopher and psychologist William James. The instruction is "to make the ordinary seem strange."[33] Barrett interprets this as an imperative for modern society to stop and think, but I would rather relate it to the third part of *England, England*. In the ending part we see the re-construction of an old England under the Medieval Latin name of Anglia. This pre-industrial, agricultural endeavour brings to mind a nineteenth-century organisation, the anti-technological Luddites. This group derived the corruption of people from the Industrial Revolution, and the birth of Anglia in *England, England* may also be considered as a sort of neo-Luddite action. The creation of multiple items in a production line indeed started with the Industrial Revolution, and this is also the era when the concept of copies came to the fore. The theoretician Kirkpatrick Sale, a defender of the Luddites, claims in an interview that "the Luddites did not want to turn the clock back. They said: 'We want to cling to this way of life, we don't want a life in which we're

31. Barrett, p. 28.
32. Barrett, p. 27.
33. Barrett, p. 26.

forced into factories, forced onto machines we can't control, and forced from village self-sufficiency into urban dependency and servitude.'"[34] Similarly, although the characters who create Anglia in the book are not necessarily anti-technological, they create their old-new land in opposition to something which heavily relies on technological innovation and, indirectly, of course, on the Industrial Revolution. Yet, the new Anglia is no less artificial than England, England, against which it wishes to revolt. Consider the following quotation from the novel describing one of the dwellers of Anglia:

> Jez Harris, formerly Jack Oshinsky, junior legal expert with an American electronics firm obliged to leave the country during the emergency. He'd preferred to stay, and backdate both his name and his technology: nowadays he shoed horses, made barrel hoops, sharpened knives and sickles, cut keys, tended the verges, and brewed a noxious form of scrumpy into which he would plunge a red-hot poker just before serving. Marriage to Wendy Temple had softened and localized his Milwaukee accent; and his inextinguishable pleasure was to play the yokel whenever some anthropologist, travel writer or linguistic theoretician would turn up inadequately disguised as a tourist. (242–3)

This anti-globalisation initiative strives to achieve a state of naturality and originality. But how natural and original is it exactly if we want to hinder or go directly against the progress of technology? Jean Baudrillard presents a relevant line of thought in *Simulacra and Simulation*, describing the moving of the Cloisters in New York. He says that "if the exportation of the cornices was in effect an arbitrary act, if the Cloisters in New York are an artificial mosaic of all cultures [...], their reimportation to the original site is even more artificial: it is a total simulacrum that links up with 'reality' through a complete circumvolution."[35] The dwellers of Anglia also achieve exactly the opposite of what they wish to achieve: their self-conscious and forceful counter-reaction to the overflow of artificial simulacra turns out to be just as artificial as the tendency they wish to take a stand against:

34. Kirkpatrick Sale and David Kupfe, "Rebel Against the Future: An Interview with Kirkpatrick Sale," *Culture Change*, accessed 27 September 2014 <http://www.culturechange.org/issue9/kirkpatricksale.html>.

35. Baudrillard, *Simulacra*, p. 9.

> Old England banned all tourism except for groups numbering two or less, and introduced a Byzantine visa system. The old administrative division into counties was terminated, and new provinces were created, based upon the kingdoms of the Anglo-Saxon heptarchy. Finally, the country declared its separateness from the rest of the globe and from the Third Millennium by changing its name to Anglia. (253)

The original idea is presented as similar to what Steven E. Jones says about the Luddites in his book, *Against Technology*: "Some assume that Luddism is just another form of Romanticism, a version of the transcendental philosophy that would rise above its own times and reject 'the future,' projecting an alternative, utopian possibility, that […] involves a nostalgic return to an older way of life, one reconciling humanity and nature in voluntary simplicity."[36] Barnes takes this Romantic notion to its extreme: the creators of Anglia even invent their own folklore. As a prominent dweller of Anglia explains, invented folklore seems more popular than the authentic originals: "If you want some local legends I've got lots of books I can lend you. Folk collections, that sort of thing. […] I've tried'em on that stuff and it don't go down so well. They prefer Jez's stories, that's the truth" (244). However, this artificial Romanticism that they decide to pursue is practically impossible to implement. Yet, the underlying urge seems to be to create something, anything that goes counter to the present system, anything that goes against radical consumerism.

It seems that every mode and way of being in *England, England* is equally constructed. We see no way of life which would be authentic, as "individuals in the spectacular society cannot recognise others or their own reality."[37] Martha Cochrane is the only character who strives for an originary state, or at least she does not approve of the simulated one. As "Appointed Cynic," her job is to doubt everything but, finally, and ironically, she is the one who seizes the governing position of the England, England theme park, although only for a short period. It is a pleasantly morbid idea that the only person who does not believe whole-heartedly in the project may get the directorial position of it. In this world of supernormal simulation it is only the cynic who may approach authenticity, or at least take a rather indifferent position, yet this is a lonesome and bitter superiority.

36. Steven E. Jones, *Against Technology: From the Luddites to Neo-Luddism* (New York: Routledge, 2006), p. 7.

37. Cubitt, p. 41.

The other character who has a special connection to authenticity is the actor playing Samuel Johnson: "his pain was authentic because it came from authentic contact with the world. […] she saw a creature alone with itself, wincing at naked contact with the world" (218). He decides to completely yield to simulation, which is probably the only way in this society to have an originary mode of being: he finds originality in simulation. The narrator's words about Martha also underpin how the characters find originality in simulation: "she had made little impression on him, and he had behaved as if she were less real than he was" (212).

There is also a third character who seems to represent an external perspective in spite of being part of the project team, and this is the historian Dr Max. He is surely someone who, in a paradoxical way, is able to appreciate the greatness of the project, but he is also disgusted with it in its entirety. This is clear from his answer to Martha's question when she asks his opinion about the project. He gives the following answer:

> Bo-gus? No, I wouldn't say that. I wouldn't say that at all. Vulgar, yes, certainly, in that it is based on a coarsening simplification of pretty well everything. Staggeringly commercial […] Horrible in many of its incidental manifestations. Manipulative in its central philosophy. All these, but not, I think, bogus. (131)

These three characters in the novel, Martha, Samuel Johnson and Dr Max, appear as counterpoints to show markedly different, eccentric attitudes in contrast to the masses; they are the only ones to represent something genuine precisely through their outsider attitudes.

The whole novel is a huge ironic flick on everything that it includes, and even on some things it only indirectly refers to. The simulation theories of Baudrillard (and, indirectly, of Debord, whose name is not mentioned in the novel but who is quoted verbatim in the speech of the French intellectual), the idea of the theme park, consumerism, contemporary social behaviour, art and representation cannot escape the cutting irony of Barnes. In a sense, this grossly over-exaggerating, simplifying and stereotypical project could also be understood as a parody not only of (post)modern man, society or literary theory but also as a parody of postmodernism itself. It parodies the striving of postmodernism to create something new from already existing ma-

terial while producing only a collage that ultimately emphasizes the inability to create anything original.

The behavioural patterns and the characters' relationship to England, England result in a very complex phenomenon. Everything is driven by consumerism and mass production. Hence, besides offering approaches to the phenomenon of the theme park from evolutionary biological and semiotic theories, the novel can also be interpreted within the framework of history, sociology, politics and anthropology. Everything coheres with everything else. On the one hand, we have the capitalist aspect with the Industrial Revolution, the development of mass production, the rising of the stimuli-threshold, the "perfection" and extreme degree of consumerism; on the other hand, all this is supported by the biological and psychological coding of humans.

It may seem somewhat unusual, but I would like to conclude my examinations with an analysis of the title. What exactly does the title *England, England* refer to besides, of course, the name of the new, improved England? These two words can be pronounced with so many different intonations and accentuations that there is probably more than one possible answer. The doubling within the title may itself refer to simulation, repetition or replica. Repetition of a word can also be easily read as some kind of reinforcement, but just as easily as a reproach. Finally, we may also interpret the title as a nostalgic sigh: Oh, England, England…

Dóra Vecsernyés

With His Watch on the Inside of the Wrist

Time in Julian Barnes's *The Sense of an Ending*

Humans are essentially temporal creatures, or "beings in time,"[1] as described by Martin Heidegger. Accordingly, their existence is to be understood in relation to, as well as in awareness of, the passing of time and the unavoidable approach of death. It is precisely this awareness of the distinction between Being and Non-Being that teaches people to value each and every moment of their lives. However, being conscious of one's own mortality does not necessarily induce action, especially not within the context of postmodernism. Characters of postmodernist fiction tend to be restricted to the realm of passivity, notably so when it comes to Julian Barnes's creations. Christopher Lloyd in *Metroland* (1980), Geoffrey Braithwaite in *Flaubert's Parrot* (1984) and Gregory in *Staring at the Sun* (1986) are all characterised by a considerable degree of passivity, a fundamental tendency towards self-reflexivity, and a preference for meditating about life instead of living it. A curious and uniquely Barnesian contrast is generated by the fact that despite their mediocre personalities and undistinguished lives, these characters theorise about highly philosophical matters such as art versus life; history versus reality; time, memory and remembering; the general progress of human life; death and religion – preoccupations which permeate Barnes's entire oeuvre. Thus, his characters come to function as the author's mouthpiece, providing him with the means of voicing his concerns and asking questions about them.

Such is the case with sixty-something pensioner Tony Webster, the central figure and narrator of Barnes's novel *The Sense of an Ending*[2] (2011). After failing to accomplish his youthful plan to live a life of literary intensity, Tony keeps consoling himself with mantras like "Ti-*yi-yi-yime* is on my side" (45) and "Every Day is Sunday" (62), and engages in self-reflexive and essentially passive contemplations of the concepts of memory, history, life and death, and the nature of time.

1. Qtd. in H. James Birx, *Encyclopedia of Time: Science, Philosophy, Theology, & Culture* (Los Angeles: SAGE, 2009), p. 642.

2. All parenthesized references are to this edition: Julian Barnes, *The Sense of an Ending* (London: Vintage Books, 2012).

Despite his passivity, Tony Webster is a Heideggerian being in that he keeps reflecting on the temporal as well as temporary nature of human existence. The present paper is devoted to analysing the various concepts and images of time occurring in *The Sense of an Ending*, along with the temporal and thematic structure of the novel, as indicators of Tony Webster's attitude to his time-bound existence and, by extension, of Julian Barnes's perception of man as a temporal-narrative being.

Human perception of time is inseparably linked to narrativity: it is through storytelling that one establishes cause-and-effect relationships and conceives of sequentiality; therefore, narratives can be looked upon as a primary means of formalising and structuring human perception and the products of the mind. Barnes expresses a similar opinion when he claims "we are a narrative animal" and "we tell stories all the time" because "we want our human life on this planet to be turned into a narrative."[3] Clearly, narratives are used to create a coherent sense of identity, regarding both the individual self and collective identity. Consequently, much of history, culture and literature have been discussed as grand narratives providing the basis for self-definition and creating a sense of coherence overarching the passing of time.

As observed by Frank Kermode, the scientific developments of the nineteenth century resulted in a turn towards the temporal in every field of knowledge.[4] While literature, one of the grand narratives, had previously been assumed to imitate an existing world order, now it was expected to create a structured world. Meanwhile, the widely discussed modernist and postmodernist – predominantly constructivist – view has been that all perception is subjective; factual and absolute truth is unavailable to human understanding; and all human knowledge is constructed in a way that it matches the current stage of scientific and cultural development. As a result, the representation of reality has also been seen as problematic. In Kermode's terms, the "prison of modern form" is "a place where we accept the knowledge that our inherited ways of echoing the structure of the world have no concord with it, but only […] with the desires of our own minds."[5] Clearly, the realisation of the artificial and non-objective nature of all attempts at grasping the world and reality is of key importance. At the same time,

3. "Julian Barnes Interview," *Writers and Company*, accessed 15 June 2013 <http://www.cbc.ca/writersandcompany/episode/2011/11/20/julian-barnes-interview/>, radio.

4. Frank Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 167.

5. Kermode, *The Sense*, p. 173.

however, this realisation also results in a state of imprisonment in which humanity admits to the limited and limiting nature of the mind, human knowledge, language and culture, while also facing the fact that there is no way to leave these faculties behind.

Tony Webster in *The Sense of an Ending* articulates a similar problem: "We live in time, it bounds us and defines us [...] But if we can't understand time, can't grasp its mysteries of pace and progress, what chance do we have with history – even our own small, personal, largely undocumented piece of it?" (60). That is, what kind of narrative representation of reality and the passing of time can be created without a proper understanding of time? Though admitting his inability to truly grasp the nature of time – "I've never felt I understood it very well" (3) – and constantly reflecting on the imperfections of his memory, Tony Webster embarks on a journey of recounting his personal history, attempting to create a coherent autobiography. As will be demonstrated, the novel depicts the kind of order Tony's mind desires as only partially accessible.

The Sense of an Ending presents a dual structure: "Part One" provides an overview of Tony's past, emphasising the formative importance of his schoolboy years spent with his friends Colin, Alex and Adrian. A significant period is his relationship with Veronica, described in detail, including issues like meeting Veronica's family; virginity and sexuality; and a break-up followed by an affair between Veronica and Tony's friend Adrian. We also hear about his time spent in the USA, an affair with a girl named Annie and Adrian's suicide. "Part One" ends with a brief survey of Tony's adult life, involving jobs, marriage, parenthood, divorce and retirement. By "Part Two," the narrative reaches Tony's present life: a letter received after the death of Veronica's mother results in the unsettling of Tony's life story presented so far, forcing Tony to face his past mistakes. This re-evaluation of his life takes the form of revisiting and rewriting memories described in the first section. Along the way, Tony arranges meetings with his ex-wife Margaret as well as with Veronica. Eventually, his search for the truth brings some success, leaving Tony in a state of distress and hopelessness.

While attempting to create a coherent life story out of these events, Tony Webster encounters problems like the imperfection of his memory and the complicated relationship between past and present, which also govern the temporal and thematic structure of the narrative. Interestingly, even though it is only in "Part Two" that Tony's account of the past is undermined by Veronica's version, Tony keeps

commenting on the deficiencies of his memory from the very beginning, when he observes "what you end up remembering isn't always the same as what you have witnessed" (3) and sets out to introduce "some approximate memories which time has deformed into certainty" (4). Later on, Tony laments the lack of evidence and witnesses: "I wish I'd kept that letter, because it would have been proof" (39) and "as the witnesses to your life diminish, there is less corroboration, and therefore less certainty" (59). As a result, the past is seen as increasingly inaccessible and disconnected from the present.

It is important to note, however, that the past is beyond reach not only due to Tony's unreliable memory, but also as a result of his self-editing. As in the case of most life-writing, Tony himself is prone to distorting the truth in order to present himself in a way that is pleasing for him, especially when it comes to inglorious events. Curiously, he admits his awareness of the phenomenon: "How often do we tell our life story? How often do we adjust, embellish, make sly cuts? […] our life is not our life, merely the story we have told about our life. Told to others, but – mainly – to ourselves" (95). Thus, regarding his shameful letter written to Adrian, disparaging Veronica, Tony demonstrates considerable reluctance to remember, presumably out of guilt and remorse. However, when Veronica sends him the letter he wrote decades earlier, he is forced to face his own actions: "My younger self had come back to shock my older self" (97–8) and "I could scarcely deny its authorship" (97). Here, the undeniable continuity of Tony's identity binds the past to the present, and Tony experiences the past as suddenly permeating the present. Though facing his past self is deeply unsettling, Tony's wish for corroboration quoted above is voiced precisely because of his need to have temporal continuity in his narrative identity.

As can be seen, the nature of the past is rather ambiguous: while Tony is constantly frustrated with the imperfections of his memory and the inaccessibility of the past, he is also forced to acknowledge the omnipresence of the past and his past actions as encoded in his personality. In line with this ambiguity, Tony accommodates two opposing urges: a wish to escape what he finds embarrassing or shameful in his past and, fuelled by the acceptance of his responsibility and the resulting remorse, a wish to turn back time and rewrite his past, correcting his mistakes. Meanwhile, his notions of time and existence in time are illustrated with the traditional image of water: still water stands for the stagnation in Tony's relationship with Veronica as well as for death in the case of Adrian's suicide, as in the image of "bathwater long

gone cold behind a locked door" (3); whereas the image of the river is associated with the passing of time and its unquestionable direction. When witnessing the Severn Bore,[6] "a river rushing nonsensically upstream" (3) caused by water incoming with the high tide from the sea, the younger Tony complains of a sense of unsettlement "because it looked and felt quietly wrong, as if some small lever of the universe had been pressed, and here, just for these minutes, nature was reversed, and time with it" (36). At this point, Tony considers time to be a fixed aspect of the universe along which everything can be ordered, and he is distressed when the order of nature is disturbed. However, even though the high tide causes disorder in the direction of the river, it is in itself a regular phenomenon of nature that reoccurs in well-defined and predictable order. Tony's shock, then, is due to his first experience of the phenomenon. As for the image of the sea, it may stand for cyclicity and infinity, and so the image of seawater coming in and disrupting the orderly progress of the river may be read as a reminder of the opposition between the infinite cyclicity of nature and the finite linearity of human existence, further motivating Tony's distress.

As the story proceeds and Tony meets Veronica by the Thames for the first time in decades, past and present intertwine: "I couldn't tell which way the tide was running, as a whippy crosswind stirred the water's surface" (90). Here, the disguised direction of the flow of the river stands for Tony's confusion regarding past and present, triggered by the presence of Veronica, a figure from his distant past. Moreover, when previously lost memories come upon Tony, he feels as if "time had been placed in reverse. As if […] the river ran upstream" (122) returning to the earlier image of the Severn Bore and indicating that the memories left behind by past events can create a sense of going back in time and re-experiencing the past.

However, such interconnectedness of past and present is even more problematic when it comes to matters of responsibility: the "chain of responsibility" (149) mentioned numerous times throughout the novel is a firm indicator not only of the direction in which time passes, but also of the irreversibility of time. As Tony observes, "the chief characteristic of remorse is that […] the time has passed for apology or amends. But what if […] by some means remorse can be made to flow backwards, can be transmuted into simple guilt, then apologised for, and then forgiven?" (107). Needless to say, Tony is eventually

6. "Introduction," *The Severn Bore: A Natural Wonder of the World*, accessed 11 November 2012 <http://www.severn-bore.co.uk>.

compelled to admit defeat: "I knew I couldn't change, or mend, anything now" (149). Inevitably, the confusing nature of his identity, along with the paradox of past and present simultaneously coexisting and being separate, result in considerable frustration on Tony's part.

On one occasion, the image of the river is substituted by blood: Tony wishes to change the past by going back in time, or making "the blood flow backwards" (130). Here, an even closer identification of time and life is suggested by the imagery: time is turned into an integral part of the human being, thereby echoing Heidegger's concept of man as a being in time. Similarly, Tony and his friends at school wear their watches "with the face on the inside of the wrist" because it makes "time feel like a personal, even a secret, thing" (6); they recognise an intimate connection between time and life through blood, wearing their watches close to their pulses. They also find a personalised version of time, which Tony describes as follows: "there is objective time, but also subjective time, the kind you wear on the inside of your wrist, next to where the pulse lies. And this personal time, which is the true time, is measured in your relationship to memory" (122).

The gesture of wearing their watches on the insides of their wrists to make time more personal echoes Henri Bergson's idea of subjective time. In Bergsonian terms, *pure duration*, or subjective time, is related to one's inner life; it is "uninterrupted transition, multiplicity without divisibility and succession without separation."[7] This inner, unfolding time is not measurable, as opposed to unfolded time, which is measurable "through the intermediary of motion"[8] and space. In light of Bergson's definition, Tony's idea that subjective time is "measured in your relationship to memory" (122) may mean that one's personal time depends on how continuous one's experience of past and present is and whether one's memory is capable of bridging any gap between them. In addition, the closeness of the watch to the pulse indicates that it is the number of heartbeats, prone to being influenced by one's changing emotions, that dictates the rhythm of the otherwise immeasurable subjective time, making it truly individualised and non-mechanical. Thus, Tony's highly subjective experience of time is not only due to his ambiguous relationship with the past, but also to the emotional content of his present: "it takes only the smallest pleasure or pain to teach us time's malleability. Some emotions speed it up, others

7. Henri Bergson, "Duration and Simultaneity," in *Key Writings*, eds. Keith Ansell Pearson and John Mullarkey (London; New York: Continuum, 2005), 205–219, p. 205.
8. Bergson, p. 209.

slow it down; occasionally, it seems to go missing – until the eventual point when it really does go missing, never to return" (3).

As the entire story is filtered through Tony's perception, and his perception is defined by the irregularity of time, his narrative is constructed in a way that it reflects "time's malleability" (3) described above. Thus, *The Sense of an Ending* offers a non-linear narrative with temporal fragmentation and frequent flashbacks and flashforwards. Or, to apply Gérard Genette's terms related to order, they are *analepses*, instances of "evocation after the fact of an event that took place earlier than the point in the story where we are at any given moment" and *prolepses*, instances of "narrating or evoking in advance an event that will take place later."[9] "Part One" in *The Sense of an Ending* covers Tony's past, with comments of the current self, while "Part Two" focuses on his present, constantly punctuated by analepses and returns to memories already narrated in "Part One" as well as introducing new memories. Meanwhile, the structure of the narrative is highly repetitive, involving recurring ideas, phrases and events. Every now and then certain memories, like the weekend spent with Veronica's family, resurface and therefore have to be re-considered. Similarly, the themes of philosophical contemplation discussed above appear again and again. Last but not least, "Time is on My Side," a song by The Rolling Stones, keeps returning like a refrain, while Veronica's constantly reoccurring comment "You just don't get it, do you?" (100) implies cyclicity and a lack of development. These repetitions and seemingly randomly resurfacing elements follow an associative structure that resembles the operation of the human mind, the workings of memory and how the brain "throw[s] you scraps from time to time" (112). Thus, the typically postmodernist fragmentation characterising the novel serves the aim of representing the mental process of remembering in a narrative format.

The Sense of an Ending presents a considerable degree of thematic coherence, despite its fragmentation. Tony Webster occasionally dismisses elements of his past as irrelevant in terms of the aspects of his life discussed in the novel: "Annie was part of my story, but not of this story" (46) and his current female acquaintances are "not part of the story either" (55). At the same time, the seemingly randomly selected images, themes and memories described in "Part One" gain significance with the benefit of hindsight, considered in relation to the

9. Gérard Genette, *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*, trans. Jane E. Lewin (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1980), p. 40.

events of "Part Two," inviting the reader to play an active role in remembering. In particular, the suicide incident of Tony's fellow student Robson is necessary to provide a point of reference for Adrian's later suicide. Furthermore, the history classes at the beginning present a variety of ways in which one may deal with the past and the question of responsibility, both of which turn out to be key concerns of the novel. Thus, *The Sense of an Ending* is permeated with recurring images and overarching themes, thereby presenting a carefully structured narrative.

When read as the fictional autobiography created by Barnes for the character Tony Webster, the novel invites considerations related to autobiographical writing. Frank Kermode's notions of life-writing can be made use of here due to his preoccupation with the temporal embeddedness of human life, history and culture. According to Kermode, writers of autobiographies wish to "achieve some measure or simulacrum of closure, and thus a substitute timelessness."[10] Indeed, Tony Webster is in search of closure by way of trying to find out the truth and processing the past, though in vain. One technique highlighted by Kermode as central to autobiographical writing is manifested in Vladimir Nabokov's "artful autobiography," which is constructed along the lines of repetition because, as stated by Nabokov, "the following of such thematic designs through one's life should be, I think, the true purpose of autobiography."[11] Kermode agrees that thematic coherence enables the autobiographer to present a unified, single self in the focus.[12] The technique applied by Barnes in *The Sense of an Ending* is precisely the creation of such thematic coherence: to aid Tony's self-definition, the particular themes and memories to be used are chosen during a process of subjective selection, interpretation and attribution of significance. As a result, certain memories are highlighted as *self-defining memories*, whereas others are dismissed as insignificant and are not included in the narrative. Self-defining memories are described by psychologists Singer and Salovey as "vivid, affectively charged, repetitive, linked to other similar memories […] related to an important unresolved theme or enduring concern"[13] that have a key influence on the

10. Frank Kermode, "Memory," in *Pieces of My Mind: Essays and Criticism 1958–2002* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2003), 289–306, p. 296.

11. Qtd. in Frank Kermode, "Memory," p. 297.

12. Kermode, "Memory," p. 297.

13. Qtd. in Dan P. McAdams, "Identity and the Life Story," in *Autobiographical Memory and the Construction of a Narrative Self: Developmental and Cultural Perspectives*, eds. Robyn Fivush and Catherine A. Haden (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2003), 187–224, p. 195.

self. It is such self-defining memories that make up the skeleton of *The Sense of an Ending*.

In addition to the temporally disrupted structure of the narrative described above, it is revealing to examine the special, subjectively constructed time frame that accommodates self-defining memories. Such a narratological analysis necessitates another concept of duration, suggested by Gérard Genette, which can be fruitfully applied alongside the Bergsonian notion of pure duration. Genette systematises the relationship between *story time*, or the actual time frame occupied by the story, and *narrative time*, or the duration devoted to telling the story in the literary text. Accordingly, the two extremes are *ellipsis*, "where a nonexistent section of narrative corresponds to some duration of story" and *descriptive pause* characterised by "absolute slowness […] where some section of narrative discourse corresponds to a nonexistent diegetic duration."[14] In between, Genette defines *scene* as featuring an "equality of time between narrative and story" and *summary* as a text which "with great flexibility of pace covers the entire range included between scene and ellipsis."[15]

In accordance with the vivid nature of self-defining memories, the novel provides extremely detailed accounts of past events, including conversations, locations and circumstances, and the recreation of then-current moods and impressions. Tony's self-defining memories are presented in the form of distinct, Genettian scenes with slide-like changes between them. Clearly, these scenes are narrated within Tony's subjective experience of time, with the speed of narrative time depending on the particular event narrated. A considerable portion of the novel is made up of meditative parts inserted into the story which deal with time, death, life, history, love, remembering and storytelling. As these sections are outside story time, they take the form of descriptive pauses. In contrast, the events and periods of Tony's life considered to be unimportant or irrelevant are either presented in the condensed form of summaries or subjected to ellipses.

The memory that Tony keeps revisiting throughout the novel and that provides one of the fundamental turning points is his reaction to Adrian's letter asking for his permission to date Veronica. When Tony first presents it in "Part One," he describes himself as "peaceable" and not wanting "to get involved," thus only sending a postcard that says "the undersigned begs to present his compliments and wishes to

14. Genette, pp. 93–4.
15. Genette, p. 94.

record that everything is jolly fine by me, old bean" (42). However, his account is permeated with irony, irritation and anger: he is annoyed by Adrian's "moral scruples" and "the hypocrisy of the letter," and upset by the fact that Veronica "had traded up: to my cleverest friend" (41). Furthermore, the degree of his agitation can be inferred from the narrative structure. Having barely mentioned Adrian's letter, Tony switches to theorising about what Adrian's career might be like, only to postpone discussing the letter: "You can probably guess that I'm putting off telling you the next bit" (40–1). After sharing the contents of the letter and his first reactions, Tony's narrative is interrupted by a gap and an asterisk indicating Tony's rage; it is only after the gap that he manages to continue telling the story. Eventually, he replies to it "properly," warns Adrian about Veronica's "damage," and wishes him "good luck" or at least claims to have done so (42). Although Tony concludes they "were now out of my life forever," he devotes considerable narrative time to reflections on Veronica and Adrian (43). Clearly, even though Tony presents this event in retrospect, from a distance of decades, he now re-experiences his then-current emotional state. As a result, the plotline comes to a halt and the subjective time-experience of the present, narrating self of Tony Webster shapes the narrative.

The narrative structure thus affected by Tony's agitation as well as his question for Alex in a conversation – "Did he tell you I wrote him a letter telling him where to shove it?" – can be read as hints at the true contents of Tony's letter, which he is initially ashamed to admit (51). Indeed, as it turns out when the letter eventually resurfaces, Tony's distress resulted in a hostile, rather vicious letter cursing Veronica, Adrian and their prospective child. Upon encountering his own words, Tony's narrative slips off again into his subjective experience of time: "I read it through, got to my feet, took my glass of wine, poured it rather splashily back into the bottle, and made myself a very large whisky" (95). Here, Tony is paralysed with his mind going blank, so that story time stops until he is recovered from his shock. In the meantime, the reader is provided with the letter itself, followed by further comments of Tony's concerning the benefits of drinking whisky. Though postponed first, the revelation of Tony's state of mind arrives after all: a sense of guilt and remorse begins to grow in him the "next day, when [he is] sober" (98). At this point, time is turned back for Tony as his mind wanders deep into the past to re-evaluate it, and he arrives at the conclusion that all the aspects of his life and personality that he previously considered to be special are actually merely "average" (100).

A similar process can be observed towards the end of the novel, when Tony talks in a pub to Terry, the care worker who looks after Adrian's son, and finally finds out the truth: the mother of Adrian's child is not Veronica, but in fact Veronica's mother. As a result, Tony goes into a state of shock; he is petrified: "Automatically, I ate a chip. Then another. There wasn't enough salt on them. That's the disadvantage of fat chips. They have too much potatoey inside" (148). Here, time for him comes to a halt again, while his mind has simultaneously too much and too little to perceive. Then, as if in a trance-like state, he shakes Terry's hand and says a few polite words. It is only after a break in the narrative, a gap on the page indicating the hours passing, that Tony manages to process this crucial piece of information: "And later, at home, going over it all, after some time, I understood" (148). At this stage, time is put into reverse once more as Tony attempts to piece together the story: what Veronica and her mother meant in their messages and what Adrian's equation stood for decades earlier. While acknowledging the cyclical recurrence of memories – "I replayed the words that would forever haunt me" – Tony also conceives of the "chain of responsibility" discussed above that stands for the linear and irreversible passing of time, leading to the realisation that "I knew I couldn't change, or mend, anything now" (149).

The inseparability of the linear and the cyclical is what fuels the final section of the novel as well, which is a brief but pointed evaluation introduced by "You are allowed a long moment of pause, time enough to ask the question: what else have I done wrong?" (149). It is indeed a long moment that Tony takes, filling it with fragments of memories and images that have already occurred in the novel: "I thought of a bunch of kids in Trafalgar Square. I thought of a young woman dancing, for once in her life" (149). To create a framework, Tony also revisits the proleptic images listed at the very beginning of the novel, at first seemingly random and unrelated, but by now shown in an entirely different light. The novel presents some degree of development in terms of Tony gaining access to information and facts falling into their places; nevertheless, induced by regret over the irreversibility of time, Tony claims: "You get towards the end of life – no, not life itself, but of something else: the end of any likelihood of change in that life" (149). Thus, Tony looks upon his life as fixed in its present state, with no future perspective, which is further illustrated by the abrupt ending of the novel: "There is accumulation. There is responsibility. And beyond these, there is unrest. There is great unrest" (150). This final,

desperate state of feeling guilt, remorse and confusion is squeezed into the confines of the present simple tense, illustrating Tony's state of being locked up in the present without any prospect for future improvement or possibility of altering the past. It is important to note, though, that this time the lack of change is not engendered by passivity. Instead, what generates Tony's hopelessness is the derailment of narrativity as a vital mode of comprehending the world and the self, as a result of which Tony ends up imprisoned in his now entangled life story and the resulting absence of a coherent sense of self.

Julian Barnes's *The Sense of an Ending*, then, is a manifestation of the temporal-narrative nature of human existence. Amidst the confusing and rather turbulent encounters between his past and present, Tony Webster presents himself as a survivor: "I survived. 'He survived to tell the tale' – that's what people say, don't they?" (56). However, telling the tale proves to be highly problematic. Although some of the truth is revealed and corroboration is found, no perfect order is reached, as Tony still thinks "of what I couldn't know or understand now, of all that couldn't ever be known or understood" (149); the tale cannot be entirely conceived even by its teller. By quoting his fellow student from decades earlier saying "there was great unrest, sir" (5), Tony comes to realise that there is only this much that can be said with certainty. In fact, Adrian Finn's very first observation that "all you can truly say of any historical [or, in this case, personal] event […] is that 'something happened'" seems to apply (5). Consequently, any attempt at representing time, reality or order in the mind or in the universe, history or one's own life story, is eventually depicted by Barnes as unavoidably incomplete and unsatisfactory. Ultimately, based on Frank Kermode's concept of the "prison of modern form," meaning the acceptance of the fact that reality can only be echoed by humanity in fictional formats that reflect "the desires of our own minds,"[16] I propose the notion of the prison of the Barnesian mind: the place where we are confined as we try to endure the unrest evoked by the realisation that our ways of echoing the structure of the world can only and exclusively indicate with surety that something is happening outside our own minds, no matter what our own desires may be.

16. Kermode, *The Sense*, p. 173.

Janina Vesztergom

"The Voice Above"[1]

Manacles of Responsibility in Julian Barnes's *Arthur & George*

1. *Arthur & George*: A "New Historical Novel"

When asked to identify the prominent themes of Julian Barnes's fiction, the well-versed reader may name a wide variety of topics such as the issue of personal identity and memory as well as that of national identity and cultural memory; the problematic and multifaceted concept of success; the steady decline of institutional religion in the West and the concurrent loss of faith; the constant search for the unattainable as a substitute for the solid intellectual foundation on which knowledge of any sort could rest; the inadequacy and unreliability of language and art as a means of representing reality; and the irretrievability of history and the past. In addition to these topics, which are inextricably linked together by their fundamentally ontological and simultaneously epistemological nature, the essentially moral question of responsibility is also a recurrent, albeit less conspicuous, subject of Barnes's fiction. Consider, for example, Christopher Lloyd's contemplation in *Metroland* (1980) of his personal responsibility for eventually opting for a way of life that goes directly against the philosophy he advocated in his early childhood; or the self-accusatory introspection of Geoffrey Braithwaite, the narrator of *Flaubert's Parrot* (1984), who, while desperately seeking to obtain information regarding Flaubert's life, struggles not only with his own existential crisis but also with the ethical dimensions of his switching off the respirator of his late wife, Ellen; or, finally, the never-ending pursuit of truth by Tony Webster, the narrator-protagonist of the Man Booker Prize-winning *The Sense of an Ending* (2011), who attempts to escape the burden of responsibility loaded onto him by the power of one single – seemingly insignificant

1. The main title of my paper is a line borrowed from an ancient Navajo Mountain Chant as translated in a Smithsonian Institute ethnographic report and quoted in David Michael Kleinberg-Levin, *Before the Voice of Reason: Echoes of Responsibility in Merleau-Ponty's* Ecology *and Levinas's* Ethics (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2008), p. 70.

– discursive moment. Similarly, the motif of responsibility appears in Barnes's 2005 novel *Arthur & George*[2] as well. As we shall see, the question of responsibility manifests itself on several levels in the novel, most conspicuously in the strong sense of personal duty the famous novelist Sir Arthur Conan Doyle assumes in the exoneration of the solicitor George Edalji, the victim of a famous miscarriage of justice.

Arthur & George relates the real-life story of George Edalji, a Birmingham solicitor of mixed Parsee and Scottish origins, who, in 1903, after being accused of mutilating cattle and other livestock in the area surrounding his native village of Great Wyrley, Staffordshire, was convicted on trumped-up evidence and sentenced to seven years' hard labour. Although after serving three years of his sentence George was granted a partial pardon and released from prison, he was not able to resume his earlier juridical career since his name had not been cleared yet. Therefore, in 1906, he appealed for help to the celebrated novelist, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, who took on the role of consulting detective, a rank he himself had invented for his own fictional character, Sherlock Holmes, and began his own investigations that led to the 1907 publication of a pamphlet entitled "The Story of Mr. George Edalji" and to George's eventual resumption of his life as a solicitor until his death in 1953.

As many critics have pointed out, this particular book, one of the many works by Barnes shortlisted for the Man Booker Prize for fiction, signals the transition in Barnes's oeuvre from his earlier works belonging to the tradition of historiographic metafiction to a new sub-genre of historical novels which, as Christine Berberich puts it, "attempts to re-create its historical setting rather than continuing postmodern fabulation."[3] According to Richard Bradford, along with such contemporary novels as David Lodge's *Author, Author* (2004) and D. J. Taylor's *Kept: A Victorian Mystery* (2006), as well as a much earlier, but perhaps even more famous example, John Fowles's *The French Lieutenant's Woman* (1969), *Arthur & George* is to be considered an example of what he refers to as the "new historical novel."[4] In Bradford's view, works belonging to this genre are written by "more

2. All parenthesized references are to this edition: Julian Barnes, *Arthur & George* (London: Vintage, 2005).

3. Christine Berberich, "'All Letters Quoted Are Authentic': The Past After Postmodern Fabulation in Julian Barnes's *Arthur & George*," in *Julian Barnes*, Contemporary Critical Perspectives, eds. Sebastian Groes and Peter Childs (London; New York: Continuum, 2011), 117–128, p. 119.

4. See Richard Bradford, "The New Historical Novel," *The Novel Now: Contemporary British Fiction* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2007), 81–99.

astute practitioners of historical fiction [who] are beginning to tire of the assumption that the nineteenth century comprised only a limitless trove of recoverable guilty secrets."[5] As Bradford argues, in *Arthur & George*

> Barnes adheres scrupulously to the well-documented facts and never employs inventive licence to suggest that the prejudices that underpinned the case were any less or more severe than disclosed in the documentary accounts. Instead he creates a modestly elegant novel out of a very real collision of actuality and literary mythology. Doyle steps into the fiction as a figure who closely resembles his own creation, Holmes, and while this carries a trace of postmodern whimsy there is the more compelling resonance of a very real character driven by a respect for truth and justice.[6]

As this quotation also indicates, Barnes's novel dealing with the case of George Edalji and The Great Wyrley Outrages strongly relies on actual historical events and biographical details as well as on legal transcripts of court proceedings. As a result, the ethical issues present in the novel, ranging from faithfulness and loyalty to racial prejudice and responsibility, are foregrounded in a highly conspicuous way. The reader is constantly compelled to pass moral judgement in order to make the text signify. In other words, in order to interpret the ethical dimension of the novel, the reader needs to enter into a dialogue with the actual moral issues presented on the fictional level. The reader's dynamic participation in the interpretative process is necessitated also by the novel's fundamentally dialogic nature apparent in its division into sections that are preceded by the first name of the character – mostly Arthur or George – from whose perspective the events are presented. As Berberich contends,

> [a]s readers, we will "see" what Arthur and George respectively see. The conclusions from these snippets are up to us and this, effectively, changes the reader-writer contract. Barnes provides the narrative framework, but the readers can themselves assume the role of investigators – assessing this piece of evidence here, or weighing up that newly emerging detail there.[7]

5. Bradford, p. 95.
6. Bradford, pp. 95–6.
7. Berberich, p. 121.

In addition, the novel's dialogism is further deepened not only by the occasional addition of minor voices but also by the undramatized third-person narrator, who, as Frederick M. Holmes observes, "refuses to pronounce authoritatively on matters that are in dispute, to offer moral judgements, or to clear up all of the novel's mysteries and uncertainties."[8]

The dialogic nature of *Arthur & George* manifests itself on the structural level as well. As early as in the first chapter, in which Arthur's childhood confrontation with a corpse is described, the reader is encouraged to expect a detective story. This generic expectation is further strengthened not only by the reader's awareness of Barnes's previous novels written in the same genre under the pseudonym Dan Kavanagh, but by the indirect evocation of the literary-mythological character Sherlock Holmes as well. On the basis of these arguments, it can be seen that *Arthur & George* invites readers to construct their own versions of the truth and rely on their own "eyes of faith" (499), much like George is required to act when attending the clairvoyant memorial of Arthur.

This readerly activity, which involves almost as much effort as a professional reading would, is called for primarily in the interpretation and evaluation of ethical issues presented on the fictional level. By relying on contemporary theories of ethical criticism, I am going to demonstrate how the moral question of responsibility manifests itself in the novel. I will argue that *Arthur & George* presents two distinct yet interrelated layers of responsibility: intrapersonal responsibility (i.e., the responsibility one feels towards oneself) and interpersonal responsibility (i.e., the responsibility one feels towards one's fellow human beings).

2. Intrapersonal Responsibility

The most fundamental level of responsibility observable in *Arthur & George* can be referred to as intrapersonal responsibility, which denotes the responsibility one feels towards one's own being as a discrete entity. This layer of onus is composed of a multiplicity of smaller elements, the most striking of which present in the novel can be related to success.

8. Frederick M. Holmes, *Julian Barnes*, New British Fiction (Basingstoke; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), p. 59.

Before discussing how self-responsibility and success are linked in Barnes's novel, the conditions for developing intrapersonal responsibility must be taken into consideration. In order to be responsible for ourselves, we have to develop into fully authentic and conscious personalities. The first step in achieving this is to form a stable identity. The possibility of forming and possessing a stable identity has always been a much-debated issue. However, as can be noticed in many other novels by Barnes,[9] a character's identity is anchored in their first memory. Here, as we have seen, Arthur's first memory, which "was to become of central importance" (5) to him, can be connected to his childhood discovery of his grandmother's corpse. The narrator's commentary, according to which "[a] grandchild who, by the acquisition of memory, had just stopped being a thing" (4), can be taken as a reference to the first step in Arthur's identity formation.

In addition to the fact that Arthur does have a first memory or, as Barnes formulates it, a "recollection obviously preceding all others" (4), the nature of his first remembered event – the inextricable link between life and death – also foreshadows his possible development of a responsible self. In his *The Gift of Death* (1992), Jacques Derrida, drawing on Jan Patočka's *Heretical Essays on the Philosophy of History*, examines the relationship between responsibility and secrecy in the European tradition. In accordance with the Czech philosopher, Derrida also claims that the concept of responsibility itself has the structure of a type of secret, since, as he puts it, "[i]t presents itself neither as a theme nor as a thesis, it gives without being seen [*sans se donner à voir*], without presenting itself in person by means of a 'fact of being seen' that can be phenomenologically intuited."[10] As Derrida argues, the abyssal dissymmetry of the gaze that commands me while remaining inaccessible to me is the gift of the "*mysterium tremendum*"[11] offered by God that "only allows me to respond and only rouses me to the responsibility it gives me by making a gift of death [*en me donnant la mort*], giving the secret of death, a new experience of death."[12] In other words, Derrida states that in order to be fully authentic, conscious and responsible subjects, every individual has to be confronted with death. As a result of the fact, however, that death is always singular

9. Julian Barnes's *England, England* is a case in point (London: Vintage, 1998), especially pp. 3–7.

10. Jacques Derrida, *The Gift of Death*, trans. David Wills (Chicago; London: The University of Chicago Press, 1995), p. 27.

11. Derrida, p. 27.

12. Derrida, p. 33.

and irreplaceable, one can only die one's own death. Therefore, relying on Levinas's theory, which considers responsibility first not as responsibility of myself for myself but as responsibility before the other, Derrida insists that our responsibility is derived foremost from the (representation of the) death of the other. In Levinas's formulation, "I am responsible for the death of the other to the extent of including myself in that death. That can be shown in a more acceptable proposition: 'I am responsible for the other inasmuch as the other is mortal.' It is the other's death that is the foremost death."[13] On the basis of the Derridean arguments, it can safely be claimed that Arthur's early confrontation with the "'white, waxen thing'" (3) prefigures his development into an authentic, responsive and responsible subject. This assumption is further strengthened by his essentially teleological view of existence, which always already entails a sense of termination.

As can be observed all through the novel, Arthur, being a man of letters, defines his life in narrative terms and conceives of his own existence as a novel in the process of being composed: "Arthur could see the beginning of the story – where he was now – and its happy end; only the middle was for the moment lacking" (7). The detective story writer's inability to find the thin dividing line between reality and fiction is most conspicuous from the point when he becomes interested in George's case and starts comparing the process of criminal investigation to the composition of a novel: "It was like starting a book: you had the story but not all of it, most of the characters but not all of them, some but not all of the causal links. You had your beginning, and you had your ending" (332). In this respect, Arthur can be considered as a representative of existentialist ethics propagated by Jean-Paul Sartre. As Sartre argues,

> man first of all is the being who hurls himself toward a future and who is conscious of imagining himself as being in the future. Man is at the start a plan which is aware of itself. Thus, existentialism's first move is to make every man aware of what he is and to make the full responsibility of his existence rest on him.[14]

Sartre stresses the importance of freedom and personal responsibility, which manifest themselves in the stance Arthur takes on life.

13. Qtd. in Derrida, p. 46.

14. Jean-Paul Sartre, "The Humanism of Existentialism," in *Classics of Western Philosophy*, ed. Steven M. Cahn (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc, 2012), 1321–1333, p. 1323.

The most striking manifestation of intrapersonal responsibility can be connected to success. Along with his general conception of existence, Arthur also interprets success within the framework of narratives; more precisely, as the climactic point of chivalric romances:

> His success was the deserved result of hard work, but those themselves unfamiliar with success imagined it the end of the story. Arthur was not yet ready for the end of his own story. If life was a chivalric quest, then he had rescued the fair Touie, he had conquered the city, and been rewarded with gold. But there were years to go before he was prepared to accept a role as wise elder to the tribe. What did a knight errant do when he came home to a wife and two children in South Norwood? (76–7)

As the last sentence of the quotation suggests, Arthur seems to face an existential failure when the events of his life do not fulfil the criteria of the genre of chivalric romance.

As opposed to Arthur, George, the earnest son of the Parsee Vicar of Great Wyrley, does not possess a first memory. Moreover, as opposed to Martha Cochrane, the protagonist of *England, England*, he does not even seem to have the imaginative capacity by which he could invent himself one:

> And while other children might make good the lack – might forcibly install a mother's doting face or a father's supporting arm in their memories – George does not do so. For a start, he lacks imagination. […] George is fully capable of following the inventions of others – the stories of Noah's Ark, David and Goliath, the Journey of the Magi – but has little such capacity himself. (4–5)

On the basis of this apparent lack of primal recollection, it can be argued that the potential development of George's stable identity is stunted from the very beginning. In addition, his possible identity formation is also hindered by the lack of a personal encounter with death. In his case, it is only through metaphoric language that any confrontation with death is possible:

> His mother takes him once a week to visit Great-Uncle Compson. He lives not far away, behind a low granite kerb which George is not allowed to cross. Every week they renew his jug of flowers.

> Great Wyrley was Uncle Compson's parish for twenty-six years; now his soul is in Heaven while his body remains in the churchyard. (7–8)

Although based on Derrida's views it could be argued that the mere linguistic representation of death exemplified by the quotation is sufficient to provide the basis for the formation of a responsible subject, George, as the omniscient narrator frequently implies, is completely unable to decipher metaphorical language:

> Christ taught in Parables, and George finds he does not like Parables. Take the Parable of the Wheat and the Tares. George understands the part about the enemy planting Tares among the Wheat, and how you shouldn't gather up the Tares in case you root out the Wheat at the same time – though he isn't entirely sure about this, because he often sees Mother weeding in the Vicarage garden and what is weeding except gathering up the Tares before they and the Wheat are fully grown? But even ignoring this problem, he can go no further. He knows the story is all about something else – that is why it is a Parable – but what this something else might be his mind will not reach to. (21–2)

As this quotation also indicates, George is unable to interpret the figurative language that serves as a basis of religious discourse, although he seems to be aware of the secondary level of meaning residing behind the actual words of the Bible. The narratorial statement from the beginning of the novel, quoted above, prefigures George's later inability to see Arthur's spirit with his "eyes of faith" (499) and, on a more general level, his lack of belief in God or in religious accounts attempting to provide sufficient explanation for otherwise inexplicable incidents.

As a result of the fact that George is unable to form a stable identity in the enclosed world of the Vicarage, the moment he is forced to move out of this comforting space with which he is already familiar, he finds himself on unstable ground. Therefore, he attempts to identify himself in relation to other beings. The first animate being he is "introduced to" (8) outside the protecting parental home is a cow:

> It is not the size of the beast that alarms him, nor the swollen udders wobbling in his eye-line, but the sudden hoarse bellow the thing utters for no good reason. It can only be in a very bad

> temper. George bursts into tears, while his father punishes the cow by hitting it with a stick. Then the animal turns sideways, raises its tail and soils itself. George is transfixed by this outpouring, by the strange splatty noise as it lands on the grass, by the way things have suddenly slipped out of control. (8–9)

Although at this stage in the novel the cow's instinctual behaviour seems to provide an adequate point of reference against which George can identify himself as the other (i.e., as a rational human being), the incident described a few pages later undermines this possibility and lowers him to the level of animals: "One afternoon, on his way back to the Vicarage, George soils himself. […] George is unable to explain to his father why, though he is nearly seven years old, he has behaved like a baby in napkins" (12–13). In addition to his regressive behaviour, which is defined by Freud as an unconscious psychological defense mechanism whereby an individual's personality retreats to an earlier stage of development in order to avoid pain or threat,[15] George's sense of his animality is further reinforced by his schoolmates' verbal and non-verbal mockery: "Henshaw makes monkey faces, pulling at the sides of his little fingers while using his thumbs to flap his ears forward" (11). What George is unwilling to recognize here is that, behind the surface, his classmates' ridicule is targeted primarily at his being not so much an animal-like creature but an Oriental, the Other.[16] According to Edward Said,

> [t]he Orient is not only adjacent to Europe; it is also the place of Europe's greatest and richest and oldest colonies, the source of its civilizations and languages, its cultural contestant, and one of its deepest and most recurring images of the Other. In addition, the Orient has helped to define Europe (or the West) as its contrasting image, idea, personality, experience.[17]

As Said's argument implies, in Edwardian England the Oriental served as a point of reference against which the English could identify themselves both on the individual and on the communal level. George's

15. See Sigmund Freud, *Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company Inc, 1977).

16. The representation of black people in animal terms as well as the parallel between the situation of black people and animals are recurrent themes in postcolonial discourse. See, for example, Marjorie Spiegel, *The Dreaded Comparison: Human and Animal Slavery* (New York: Mirror Books, 1988).

17. Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (London: Penguin, 2003), pp. 1–2.

reluctance to consider himself as the Other is presented several times throughout the novel, most conspicuously when he engages in conversation with Arthur and, being shocked by the writer's remark "we are … unofficial Englishmen" (303), reflects: "How is he less than a full Englishman? He is one by birth, by citizenship, by education, by religion, by profession. […] he has no other land. He cannot go back two generations. He can hardly return to India, a place he has never visited and has little desire to" (303–4). George's unwillingness and inability to assess his existence and situation in accordance with prevailing norms and prejudices can further be demonstrated by his naive refusal to consider racial prejudice as the motive for the persecution against him:

> There has been an occasional slight, but what man does not suffer that, in some form or another? […] There were teasings and jokes. I am not so naive as to be unaware that some people look at me differently. But I am a lawyer, Sir Arthur. What evidence do I have that anyone has acted against me because of race prejudice? […] Did the jury find me guilty because of my skin? That is too easy an answer. (300–1)

As has been stated above, George seems to have trouble interpreting secondary levels of meaning. However, in this case he fails to accept the easiest explanation for his persecution because his mind does not seem to be affected by racist thinking.

By following the line of argumentation regarding identity and its interrelatedness with intrapersonal responsibility, it can be stated that in a culture which rejects him as essentially Other, George's repeated attempts at forming a stable identity in relation to his fellow pupils and, as I am going to demonstrate later, to his fellow citizens, are doomed to failure.

3. Interpersonal Responsibility

The second level of responsibility that appears in *Arthur & George* can be referred to as interpersonal responsibility, which signifies the responsibility one feels towards one's fellow human beings. As this layer inherently involves a relation between two or more people, its manifestation in George's case is clearly apparent, since he constantly

tries to define his identity in relation to others. As in his efforts at self-identification, George also attempts to construct his sense of responsibility and success from his relations with his fellow citizens. This argument can best be illustrated by his *Railway Law for the "Man in the Train"* (1901), the title page of which is reproduced in the novel and, as Berberich also points out, "brilliantly conveys his pride in his achievements and in his seemingly secure position as a pillar of society quite literally upholding law and order."[18] However, in the same way that George is incapable of forming a stable identity and assessing his situation in the community clearly, it can be seen that he is also unable to realize the needs of the society he is desperately trying to become part of. Instead of sharing the view of passengers who regard the train merely as a practical means of public transport, George considers the railway service to be a complex network of obligations binding the passengers and the railway company: "George marvels at how the British, who gave railways to the world, treat them as a mere means of convenient transport, rather than as an intense nexus of multiple rights and responsibilities" (70). The fallacy of George's sense of himself as "an authority upon an aspect of the law which is of practical help to many people" (94) lies in *his* reluctance to accept railway passengers' unwillingness to use their rights. According to Werner Hamacher,

> [i]t belongs to the very concept of rights […] that they include the "right" *not* to exercise them. Whoever is so disposed may decline to use the right to property and to security, the right to resistance to oppression, and even the right to freedom. But such a person neither renounces those rights nor forfeits them, but only declines to use them, to appeal to them, and to make them a ground for action. This undeclared implication of all rights propounds – in an equally undeclared manner – that the use of all rights and even of the sphere of rights itself may in principle be declined.[19]

On the basis of Hamacher's views, it can be argued that the important distinction between the travelling public's unawareness of their rights and their unwillingness to use their rights seems to be blurred

18. Berberich, p. 122.

19. Werner Hamacher, "The Right Not to Use Rights: Human Rights and the Structure of Judgements," in *Political Theologies: Public Religions in a Post-Secular World*, eds. Hent de Vries and Lawrence E. Sullivan (New York: Fordham University Press, 2006), 671–690, p. 685.

in George's mind. As a result of his mistaken assumptions about the society he is struggling to become a useful member of, George is unable to develop a sufficient sense of interpersonal responsibility. Similarly to George, his father is also mistaken in his supposition concerning his son's significance in serving the community. Symbolically, this can be demonstrated by the fact that he gives George a sepia print of the Pre-Raphaelite William Holman Hunt's *The Light of the World* when *The Scapegoat* painted by the same artist would have been more reflective of his son's place in society (67).

George's futile attempts to be responsible for others stand in sharp contrast with the lack of responsibility directed at him, which manifests itself most strikingly in Mrs Greatorex's response to Arthur's inquiry concerning the reason for her withholding of information that resulted in the incrimination of an innocent person: "And if you are concerned about your young friend's wrongful imprisonment, then I was concerned about the same thing happening to Royden Sharp" (407). The woman's preference for sacrificing George for the sake of saving Royden Sharp, the "wild boy" (401) who turns out to be the real culprit of the crime that George was wrongfully accused of committing, can be explained by Derrida's commentary on Kierkegaard's *Fear and Trembling*. Derrida argues that we fear and tremble before God, who makes us responsible for our own salvation while remaining absent, inaccessible, secret and silent. As Derrida puts it,

> God doesn't give his reasons, he acts as he intends, he doesn't have to give his reasons, or share anything with us: neither his motivations, if he has any, nor his deliberations, nor his decisions. Otherwise he wouldn't be God, we wouldn't be dealing with the Other as God or with God as *wholly other* [*tout autre*].[20]

As the next move of his argument, Derrida elaborates on Kierkegaard's views concerning Abraham's sacrifice of his son, Isaac. Kierkegaard argues that by keeping silent about what God commanded him to do, Abraham steps outside the ethical order that is formed by society and that ties responsibility to accountability within the public, non-secret domain. Although Abraham is irresponsible in declining to divulge the secret of the sacrifice, he is responsible in resisting the "irresponsibilization" of an ethical explanation, the temptation of the ethical. In Derrida's words,

20. Derrida, p. 57.

> [h]e keeps quiet in order to avoid the moral temptation which, under the pretext of calling him to responsibility, to self-justification, would make him lose his ultimate responsibility along with his singularity, make him lose his unjustifiable, secret, and absolute responsibility before God.[21]

On the basis of Kierkegaard's views, Derrida goes on to argue that if responsibility binds us in our singularity to the absolute singularity of the other as other, we are constantly forced to sacrifice the same responsibility to all other others: "*Every other (one) is every (bit) other* [*tout autre est tout autre*]."[22] In other words, as a result of the fact that there is a prioritized chain of responsibilities (i.e., people we are responsible for), responsibility for one single person can only be taken at the expense of everyone else. I would argue that Mrs Greatorex's decision to withhold information for the sake of saving Royden Sharp even at the price of incriminating George can be considered as a perfect instance of this ethically unjustifiable sacrifice.

As opposed to Mrs Greatorex, on the basis of his readiness to help George clear his name, Arthur could be regarded as someone who feels responsible for the solicitor. However, his essentially self-centred nature and his preoccupation with his own success as a writer undermine this possibility. The argument that George's case excites the interest of Arthur as the writer of detective novels rather than as a compassionate citizen willing to fight for the exoneration of his fellow human being out of pure sympathy and an insistence on moral principles can be supported by George's critical remarks on Arthur's incapacity to differentiate between the process of criminal investigation and the composition of a fictional work whereby he rendered the evidence against Royden Sharp valueless:

> This was where Sir Arthur's excess of enthusiasm had led him. And it was all, George decided, the fault of Sherlock Holmes. Sir Arthur had been too influenced by his own creation. Holmes performed his brilliant acts of deduction and then handed villains over to the authorities with their unambiguous guilt written all over them. But Holmes had never once been obliged to stand in the witness box and have his suppositions and intuitions and immaculate theories ground to very fine dust over a period of

21. Derrida, p. 61.
22. Derrida, p. 68.

> several hours by the likes of Mr Disturnal. What Sir Arthur had done was the equivalent of go into a field where the criminal's footprints might be found and trample all over it wearing several different pairs of boots. He had, in his eagerness, destroyed the legal case against Royden Sharp even as he was trying to make it. And it was all the fault of Mr Sherlock Holmes. (426–7)

Arthur's obsession with his success as a novelist and the resulting inability to act in a responsible way can further be supported by his self-reproach: "I had eyes, and did not see. I did not spot the accursed microbe. I did not pay her enough attention. I was too busy with my own … success" (85). However, on the basis of my previous arguments, it can be claimed that it is precisely this inability to be fully responsible for others that enables Arthur to develop intrapersonal responsibility and make his fame on the literary stage.

Conclusion

It can be concluded that the two interrelated levels of responsibility – the intrapersonal and interpersonal levels – are represented by the two eponymous characters of the novel, Arthur and George, respectively. While Arthur manages to form a stable identity and, thereby, a strong sense of self-responsibility as well, George, the hard-working solicitor, remains unable to develop an authentic and responsible self and to assess his position in society clearly. The two protagonists mutually complement each other from the point of view of responsibility, demonstrating one of Barnes's several attempts at composing a fundamentally dialogic novel that aims at creating an equilibrium in the critical reader's mind.

Anxiety

Eszter Szép

"Your Species"

The Rupture Between Man and Animal in Julian Barnes's *A History of the World in 10½ Chapters*

> For we shall have to ask ourselves, inevitably, what happens to the fraternity of brothers when an animal enters the scene.
> Jacques Derrida, "The Animal That Therefore I Am (More To Follow)"

This paper investigates the various ways in which animals enter the scene in Julian Barnes's *A History of the World in 10½ Chapters*[1] (1989), and an equally important point of investigation will concern the ways humans enter the scene of animals in this book. In *A History,* human-animal encounters can be interpreted as shedding light on an unresolved set of questions concerning the nature of the co-existence of man and animal. The three main areas of study I will refer to in this paper are observing animals and being observed by them as raised by John Berger; Descartes and Lacan's perception of animals as machines and their contrasting animals and humans along the division of lacking a soul and having one; and, finally, the problem of nakedness as discussed by Derrida. Concentrating on three chapters from Barnes's book, "The Stowaway," "The Survivor," and "Shipwreck," my aim is to show how Barnes's text reflects on human-animal encounters. Specifically, I show that in the chapters "The Survivor" and "Shipwreck" the animal-human boundary is dubious and the Cartesian idea of the animal-machine receives provocative intertexts; while the final part of my paper examines chapter one, "The Stowaway," where the narrator is an animal and, therefore, traditionally, it could not say "I am" – yet it does.

1. All parenthesized references (*A History*) are to this edition: Julian Barnes, *A History of the World in 10½ Chapters* (New York: Vintage, 1989).

Looking at Animals

In his seminal essay "Why Look at Animals?" (1980), John Berger writes about a historical process that seems to be culminating in our time: the gradual "cultural marginalization of animals."[2] There are no animals around us now, they are not our immediate companions the way they used to be. We do not rely on them in our daily activities, nor are they part of our households any more: they are bred and killed in factories behind closed doors. Berger defines two ways of survival for the marginalized animal: as "human puppets," the two most widespread subcategories of which are pets and Disney heroes, or as becoming spectacle in the zoos or in wildlife documentaries.

When we, Westerners from the twenty-first century, most probably in an urban environment, think about animals and our relationship with them, we project our notions back onto earlier ages. However, the animal-human relationship used to be radically different and used to have several contradictory aspects: "to suppose that animals first entered the human imagination as meat or leather or horn is to project a 19th century attitude backwards across the millennia. Animals first entered the imagination as messengers and promises"[3]: they were signs of the supernatural.[4] As Berger notes, there is no other species that would recognize himself in the look of animals, only the human: "Man becomes aware of himself returning the look."[5] In spite of, or rather *with*, this element of recognition, which will be a central point of analysis in this paper, animals were killed and eaten. Apart from the supernatural level and the aspect of self-recognition, animals were also a source of food: a "peasant becomes fond of his pig and is glad to salt away its pork."[6] Animals were "subjected *and* worshipped, bred *and* sacrificed."[7] Animals were regarded as simultaneously similar to us and different from us.

The loss of this dualism with Descartes is another key point in my analysis to come: what is of importance now, at the beginning of this paper, is the act of projecting our modern, pet-based or spectacle-based relationship with animals back on history. We naively believe that we

2. John Berger, "Why Look at Animals?" in *About Looking* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980), 1–26, p. 13.

3. Berger, p. 2.

4. The Latin word *avis* also indicates to us the supernatural perception of animals. *Avis* means bird and omen at the same time.

5. Berger, p. 3.

6. Berger, p. 5.

7. Berger, p. 5.

can grasp the historicity of animals, yet we cannot. And in *A History* the worms, cats, whales, reindeers, and Amazonian natives all reflect our projections back at us: they talk back, they are incomprehensible, they behave like humans. In this respect it is vital that the only actual picture that is shown to the readers, an intruding visual element in the text, is of most animal-like people: naked, exposed, devastated, natural and unnatural, *The Raft of the Medusa*. The picture serves as a visual amplifier of the various hints and plot elements concerning animals and humans, suggesting that a clear-cut Cartesian distinction and hierarchy is impossible to make.

Naturally, it is in the case of the first-person narrator of the first chapter, the woodworm, that we can feel the strongest resistance to our own projections. He talks to us and often about us, but never gives us, readers, a chance to talk back to agree or disagree. Kath of "The Survivor" is also entrapped in her projections on nature: her cats are not well-nurtured and healthy, but starving; her utopian island is a technically well-equipped hospital, and she gradually identifies herself with toxically exposed (dead) reindeer. The heroes become victims of their own projections on nature in both Ararat chapters.

Being Seen

But why do our projections – projected with the best of intentions, of course – go astray? Berger suggests that the main reason is that we do not let ourselves be seen by an animal. Animals do not "reserve a special look for man [...] [t]he animal scrutinizes [man] across a narrow abyss of non-comprehension."[8] In "The Animal that Therefore I am (More to Follow)" Derrida highlights the importance of being looked at by animals: "the animal looks at us, and we are naked before it. Thinking perhaps begins there."[9] He also describes the look of the animal as a "bottomless gaze," and also as "abyssal": "the gaze called animal offers to my sight the abyssal limit of the human: the inhuman or the ahuman, the ends of man, that is to say the bordercrossing from which vantage man dares to announce himself to himself."[10]

According to Berger, this "abyss of non-comprehension" is what is similar in man and animal: the non-comprehension through which we,

8. Berger, p. 3.

9. Jacques Derrida, "The Animal That Therefore I Am (More to Follow)," trans. David Willis, *Critical Inquiry* 28.2 (2002), 369–418. p. 397.

10. Derrida, "The Animal," p. 381.

humans, see the world is similar, though not identical with the non-comprehension of animals: "And so, when [man] is *being seen* by the animal, he is being seen as his surroundings are seen by him."[11] We recognize our look in the animal: this is what makes them strangely familiar. Yet, the animal is distant because of its silence. This idea of silence, the languagelessness of animals, will be challenged by Derrida, but at this point what matters is not the language but the look. The look of animals that is no longer taken, as we do not let ourselves be seen by animals.

Observing animals in zoos or in films, and discussing them, is a human right. By establishing zoos or shooting nature films, we eliminate the chance for reciprocity that used to be present in human-animal relationships even two hundred years ago.[12] Zoos appeared at a time when animals started to disappear from everyday life.[13] Zoos are, as it is a commonplace by now, essentially connected to the colonial enterprise, and, as a result, animals have become involved in a political game. Animals have become indexes of human power at the zoo: we observe them to maintain our difference.[14] Discussing manipulated wildlife documentaries, Garrard writes about a phenomenon that I consider crucial in the understanding of zoos as well: "the illusion of unrestricted access." [15]

In *A History*, somewhere in the middle of the process of associating herself with reindeers, Kath, the survivor, also refers to zoos:

> 'How are you tonight, Kath?'
> 'I thought you always said *we*. That is, if you're who you pretend you are.'
> 'Why should I say *we*, Kath? I know how I am. I was asking about you.'
> '*We*,' I said sarcastically, 'We in the zoo are fine, thank you very much.'
> 'What do you mean, the zoo?'

11. Berger, p. 3.
12. The time span of two hundred years is Derrida's suggestion ("The Animal," p. 394), and Berger also writes that the change started at the beginning of the nineteenth century (p. 9).
13. Berger, p. 19.
14. On the other side of this coin of observance we find wildlife documentaries with their highly problematic inheritance of manipulative techniques from the 1980s, and the still existing issues of framing, selection, isolation of species, and attraction-seeking attitudes. See Greg Garrard, "Animals," in *Ecocriticism* (London; New York: Routledge, 2004), 136–159.
15. Garrard, p. 153.

> 'The bars, stupid.' I didn't really think it was a zoo; I wanted to find out what they thought it was. Fighting your own mind isn't always an easy business.
> [...]
> I think I know what my mind is doing. It *is* a sort of zoo I'm imagining, because a zoo is the only place I've seen reindeer. Live, I mean. So I associate them with bars. My mind knows that for me it all started with the reindeer; that's why it invented this deception. It's very plausible, the mind. (101)

A zoo is the place where animals are observed but they "look sideways."[16] Kath takes on the position of an animal in the zoo: as a patient, she becomes a spectacle for doctors and nurses without ever having the possibility of returning their (medical) gaze. We should not forget that she has already been cast as an animal: she has constantly been referred to as a "silly cow" (e.g., 87). But at that point the position was forced on her by Greg, whom she casts as a dinosaur, and she did her best to rationalize being a "silly cow": "maybe women are more in touch with the world […] well, everything's connected isn't it, and women are more closely connected to all the cycles of nature and birth and rebirth" (89). As her story progresses, as she spends (or thinks she spends, which is eventually the same thing) more time with two cats confined in a boat, she increasingly identifies herself with the position of animals and she seems to have less control over her life: "I wish I knew how much I was poisoned. Enough to put a blue stripe down my back and feed me to the mink?" (104), as they did with toxically exposed reindeers. Like zoo animals, she is never looked in the eye. In response, she reacts through averting her own gaze: "I've started closing my eyes" (104).

I would like to argue that this gesture is an attempt on Kath's part to challenge our modern relationship with animals, which has already incorporated the loss of the act of being seen "in the seeing." Derrida comments on the loss and the necessity of the reciprocity of the act of looking with the following words:

> What does this bottomless gaze [of Derrida's cat] offer to my sight? What does it "say" to me, demonstrating quite simply the naked truth of every gaze, given that that truth *allows me to see*

16. Berger, p. 26.

and be seen through the eyes of the other, in the *seeing* and not just *seen* eyes of the other?[17]

Derrida's questions address the issue of being open to the gaze of the animal other. This openness implies that the look of the animal – in Derrida's example, the look of his cat – is given the status of being able to arrest one's gaze. By allowing a reciprocal look to take place between man and animal, Derrida aims at restoring a crucial element that was lost and at revealing the historical process leading to the hierarchical differentiation between humans and animals, between humans and the wholly other.

The Wholly Other

Both Berger and Derrida trace the process of separating ourselves from animals and of establishing a hierarchical relationship back to Descartes. With his *cogito ergo sum*, Descartes radically separated body and soul, and defined the body in terms of obeying the laws of physics. In his logic, "since animals were soulless, the animal was reduced to the model of a machine."[18] The animal is a machine in the sense of not having or, the way Derrida approaches the topic, in the sense of not being given the power of "speech, reason, experience of death, […] lie."[19] The position taken up by Kath in "The Survivor" chapter is essentially similar to the deprived state of animals. Her position is also linked to the historical and theological debates about the status of women, thus highlighting a connection between animals and the second sex. As with the attempts to differentiate between humans and animals, woman-related debates also addressed the issue whether or not women had a soul, or what position they should occupy in the family and hence in society.

In the way Derrida interprets Descartes, and also in the twists of Barnes's plot, the animal stands for the "wholly other."[20] Referring to the animal as a metaphor for otherness is a widespread cultural phenomenon: "Animals stand for all forms of social otherness: race, class, and gender are frequently figured in images of subhuman brutishness,

17. Derrida, "The Animal," p. 381.
18. Berger, p. 9.
19. Jacques Derrida, "And Say the Animal Responded," trans. David Willis, in *Zoontologies: The Question of the Animal*, ed. Cary Wolfe (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 121–146, p. 137.
20. Derrida, "The Animal," p. 380.

bestial appetite, and mechanical servility."[21] Categorizing the animal as "wholly other" is further emphasized by Lacan, who bases his ideas about animals on the Cartesian principle that there is a radical difference between man and animal, and that the animal is the one without a soul. Lacan casts the animal in the realm of the imaginary, in a pre-language, pre-society stage, and, in Derrida's critical words, Lacan is "*depriving* it [the animal] of any access to the symbolic, that is to say to the law, and to whatever is held to be proper to the human."[22]

Derrida's lecture-based essay "And Say the Animal Responded?" analyses Lacan's views on animals and takes a stance against it. Lacan states that animals belong to the pre-symbolic order, as they do not respond, only react,[23] and they do not possess "a second degree reflexive power, a power that is *conscious* of being able to deceive by pretending to pretend."[24] Derrida criticizes this categorization of Lacan, as it keeps animals in "Cartesian fixity."[25] I would like to argue in this paper that Derrida's criticism of the Cartesian/Lacanian notion of the animal as the radically other, and what Derrida offers instead, are confirmed in Barnes's *A History*.

> It is less a matter of asking whether one has the right to refuse the animal such and such a power (speech, reason, experience of death, mourning, culture, institution, technics, clothing, lie, pretense of pretense, covering of tracks, gift, laughter, tears, respect, and so on – the list is necessarily without limit, and the most powerful philosophical tradition within which we live has refused the "animal" all those things) than of asking whether what calls itself human has the right to rigorously attribute to man, which means therefore to attribute to himself, what he refuses the animal, and whether he can ever possess the *pure, rigorous, indivisible* concept, as such, of that attribution.[26]

It is the act of attribution that Derrida criticizes and that, in my reading, certain chapters of *A History* also argue against. Derrida imagines the man-animal difference as a rupture on the two sides of which it is not the general concept of "human" and "animal" that can be found, but

21. W. J. T. Mitchell, "Illusion: Looking at Animals Looking," in *Picture Theory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 329–344, p. 333.
22. Derrida, "And Say," p. 122 (emphasis added).
23. Derrida, "And Say," pp. 124–8.
24. Derrida, "And Say," p. 130.
25. Derrida, "And Say," p. 124.
26. Derrida, "And Say," pp. 137–8.

what Derrida calls "a heterogeneous multiplicity of the living."[27] This multiplicity is characteristic of every organization (or the lack of organization) and every relation. Hence, distinctions are more and more difficult to make along a binary division, such as distinguishing figures of the organic and inorganic, of life and death.[28] This problematic differentiation between organic and inorganic is increasingly present in post-human and cyborg philosophy, and also in ecocriticism, which examines the animal-human-technology triangle.

This set of questions also appears in *A History*, in chapter four "The Survivor," and chapter five, "Shipwreck." This latter chapter is (allegedly) based in terms of its language on "the 1818 London translation of Savigny and Corrèard's *Narrative of a Voyage to Senegal*" (308). Here we can read in great detail about the extreme circumstances and ways of how fifteen people survived the shipwreck of the Medusa. After the description we can see the painting called *The Raft of the Medusa* (1819) by Théodore Géricault, which is followed by a meditation over the nature and tools of the painting. What can be striking for us, reading *A History* along with the quote by Derrida discussed above, is that the raft is referred to in the text that allegedly uses early nineteenth-century language as a "machine" eleven times (e.g., 117). While Derrida is writing against Descartes and Lacan's notion that the animal works mechanically, now we have a raft described as a machine, and a picture of devastated, cannibalistic humans presented naked, as animals. Animals, who are considered machines. The following quotes illustrate the ways in which Barnes's text addresses the issues of the animal-human and machine-animal divisions:

> But scarcely had fifty men got on board this *machine* – whose extent was twenty metres in length and seven in breadth – than it sank to at least seventy centimetres under water. [...] In the first night, a storm got up and threw the *machine* with great violence; the cries of those on board mingled with the roaring of the billows. [...] Order was restored, and there was an hour of tranquillity upon that fatal *machine*. (117–8, emphasis added)

According to the Oxford Dictionary of English, the word "machine" appeared in English in the middle of the sixteenth century, and originally

27. Derrida, "The Animal," p. 399.
28. Derrida, "The Animal," p. 399.

meant "a structure."[29] The word itself is of Doric Greek origin: *makhana* (Greek *mēkhanē*, from *mēkhos* 'contrivance'). The raft on which the survivors sacrifice the weak "for the common good" (121) is a machine, and on it the humans become machines, animals. Géricault's painting stops the reading of the chapter and makes us contemplate this machinery, this animality, this brutality, this monstrosity, this bestiality. We contemplate the sudden visuality of the twisted postures, the devastated stretching, the exposed nakedness. We get a picture about the experience that defies language and a powerful illustration of the instinct to survive. Is the human an animal in this scene?

> On counting their numbers, it was found that they were twenty-seven. Fifteen of these were likely to live for some days; the rest, suffering from large wounds and many of them delirious, had but the smallest chance of survival. In the time that might elapse before their deaths, however, they would surely diminish further the limited supply of provisions. *It was calculated* that they could well drink between them as many as thirty or forty bottles of wine. To put the sick on half allowance was but to kill them by degrees. (120–1, emphasis added)

Taken the rationality of the process of decision making, the behaviour of the mechanical and machine-like humans of the raft makes the distinction between humans and machine-like animals most uncertain and blurred.

At the time when the cultural status of animals started to change in the direction of marginalization, the philosopher Jeremy Bentham took a radical stance and denied any natural difference between man and animal.[30] In chapter five of *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation* (1789) he categorized pleasures and pains. It is in this section that Bentham raises the idea that animals can suffer pain:

> X. 8. The pleasures of benevolence are the pleasures resulting from the view of any pleasures supposed to be possessed by the beings who may be the objects of benevolence; to wit, the sensitive beings we are acquainted with; under which are commonly

29. "Machine," *Oxford English Dictionary*, accessed 28 September 2014 <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/111850?rskey=rPSUHc&result=1#eid>.

30. A similar provocative intent can be seen in Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*.

> included, 1. The Supreme Being. 2. Human beings. 3. Other animals. These may also be called the pleasures of good-will, the pleasures of sympathy, or the pleasures of the benevolent or social affections.
> XI. 9. The pleasures of malevolence are the pleasures resulting from the view of any pain supposed to be suffered by the beings who may become the objects of malevolence: to wit, 1. Human beings. 2. Other animals. These may also be styled the pleasures of ill-will, the pleasures of the irascible appetite, the pleasures of antipathy, or the pleasures of the malevolent or dissocial affections.[31]

Bentham also argued against the traditional superiority of man: "a full-grown horse or dog is beyond comparison a more rational, as well as more conversable animal, than an infant of a day or a week or even a month old."[32] Derrida interprets Bentham with the following words, and his interpretation is vital for the present reading of "Shipwreck":

> Bentham said something like this: the question is not to know whether an animal can think, reason, or talk, something we still pretend to be asking ourselves. […] The *first* and *decisive* question will rather be to know whether animals *can suffer*. "Can they suffer?" asks Bentham simply yet so profoundly.[33]

Animals do suffer, and this erases the difference between animals and humans. Suffering, as Derrida writes, is not a power, but "a possibility without power, a possibility of the impossible. Mortality resides there."[34] According to Bentham, says Derrida, suffering is the link between us and them, it eliminates these very categories: "us," "them."

What happens in Géricault's painting and in "Shipwreck," in the story of the "possibility of the impossible"? These humans are like animals not because of the morally loaded categories of "bestiality" or "monstrosity," nor because of the "sub-human" nature of their deeds or their cannibalism, but because of the common ground of suffering.

31. Jeremy Bentham, "Pleasures and Pains, Their Kinds," in *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation*, *Library of Economics and Liberty*, accessed 21 September 2014 <http://www.econlib.org/library/Bentham/bnthPML5.html#Chapter%20V,%20Pleasures%20and%20Pains,%20Their%20Kinds>.
32. Qtd. in Garrard, pp. 136–7.
33. Derrida, "The Animal," pp. 395–6.
34. Derrida, "The Animal," p. 396.

This suffering is narrated to us twice: once verbally, once visually. Man and animal are not equal, but they are not different in suffering.

When I write "man" and "animal" I use those very generalizing categories Derrida calls "general singular"[35]: "one can never have the right to take animals to be the species of a kind that would be named the Animal."[36] Against this unifying and simplifying perspective Derrida creates a neologism, the word *animot*: "Neither a species nor a gender nor an individual, it is an irreducible living multiplicity of mortals."[37] In fact, each and every mention of "the animal" in this essay should be understood as *animot*. And so should every mention of animals in Barnes's *A History*, a text that is very sensitive to this generalization.

The General Singular

One symptom of our generalizing perception of "the animal" is that the animal is referred to as "it" in the Neutrum. Traditionally, the sexuality of the animal "is as a matter of principle left undifferentiated."[38] In "The Survivor" we can see that, in parallel to Kath's identification with animals, the animals are not thought about as sexually neutral; the difference of their sexuality is given back to them. Castration is possibly the most violent version of this deferral of animal sexuality, and in this respect it is symptomatic that Kath does not have her cat "fixed." While the name of the cat is also significant, as it is not a traditional pet name (he is called Paul), the very word of "fixing" is also telling. What is wrong with the sexuality of animals that has to be fixed? Why are pets, those closest to us, those most dependent on us, and on whom we are also most dependent, safe only if "neutralized?"[39] As Berger writes, a pet is an animal that is part of, who is even a member of, the close family; who (yes, who) is "deprived of almost all other animal contact."[40] The pet completes its owner and "offers its owner a mirror to a part that is otherwise never reflected."[41] Still, it needs to be fixed.

This particular cat in "The Survivor" is called Paul, and is not castrated. Paul is as real for Kath as Greg, her partner. As they are of equal

35. Derrida, "The Animal," p. 408.
36. Derrida, "The Animal," p. 399.
37. Derrida, "The Animal," p. 409.
38. Derrida, "The Animal," p. 408.
39. Derrida, "The Animal," p. 408.
40. Berger, p. 12.
41. Berger, p. 13.

status, turning the direction of castration is very plausible for Kath: "It's not a cat's fault that it's a cat. [...] Sometimes, when he [Greg] slapped me around, I'd think, maybe we ought to get you fixed first, that might make you less aggressive" (88). Kath's stance is, I think, very close to Derrida's. She mentions the idea of evolution (actually the only references to Darwinism in the book can be found in this chapter), and considers the human-animal distinction an artificial one. Kath revolts against the "general singular" of how man thinks about animals by identifying herself and her partner with them. She finds refuge in the world of animals, as the final paragraph of the chapter indicates:

> The next day, on a small, scrubby island in the Torres Strait, Kath Ferris woke up to find that Linda had given birth. Five tortoise-shell kittens, all huddling together, helpless and blind, yet quite without defect. She felt such love. The cat wouldn't let her touch the kittens, of course, but that was all right, that was normal. She felt such happiness! Such hope! (111)

The optimism of Darwinism, the idea that the constant progress of the species results in better and better specimens as the fittest survives, the notion that humankind is a species that has evolved more perfectly from our ancestors than apes, are all refuted by Kath. There is no hierarchy. And there is no optimism, either:

> 'So you keep saying. Well. So, in your *version*' – I stressed the word – 'where did they find me?'
> 'About a hundred miles east of Darwin. Going round in circles.' (109)

The "general singular," the undifferentiated and insensitive approach to the other that is revolted against in the character of Kath gets strong and explicit criticism in chapter one "The Stowaway." The narrator, the woodworm, says "your species" fifteen times (e.g., 19). It is part of our (post)modern image of ourselves that we do not think enough about ourselves as a species, as a species that is just one among an innumerable number of species. A young and weak species, for that matter. Ecocriticism – and in my interpretation Barnes supports this view in *A History* – attempts to reinsert this idea into critical thought, and many biologists state that we do not have much chance for survival unless we start to think about ourselves as a species.

The expression "your species" also offers a mirror to our "general singular": we prefer sensitive distinctions along racial, cultural, or national lines. "Your species" is just too large a category, it is much too undifferentiated. The term is not situated firmly enough. "Your species" is doing to humans what humans are doing to animals: uses general categories, and does not allow for a possibility to let the other speak. "Your species" makes humans face what Derrida claims in his *The Animal That Therefore I Am*: that there is no one singular "Animal." Animals and humans are part of the "multiplicity" of the living: the dualism introduced by humans is, according to Derrida, an artificial and reductive one. The first chapter in Barnes's *A History* is an ironic commentary on both the artificiality and the reductive nature of humans' attitude to nature, animals, and themselves.

The character that makes us, readers, face our own projections is a woodworm, an *anobium domesticum*, an almost invisible animal, marginal to our perception of the animal kingdom, and marginal to our perception in general: we tend not to notice it at all. As an ironic answer to those who differentiate humans and animals on the basis of the existence or lack of language, our storyteller is a very wordy woodworm, as if Barnes's aim was, along with Derrida, to move our thinking about animals out of the Cartesian fixity, where it had been cast for several centuries. Derrida states that in the state of languagelessness, where animals are cast by humans, it is the "passivity of being named, this impossibility of reappropriating one's own name"[42] that is the reason of sadness. And precisely this "passivity of being named" is what we have to face in the woodworm's fifteen instances of "your species." And there is no way to respond.

Provocatively, this wordy worm narrator speaks about him/herself in the first person singular. He/she says "I," and disagrees with Lacan's casting him/her in the pre-symbolic order in all his/her wordiness. He/she says "I" and narrates the story. He/she is Derrida's perfect "autobiographical animal,"[43] unlike those people of literature who engage in their autobiographies. In the concept of the autobiographical animal Derrida connects the personal pronoun "I," which can be said by anyone, yet denotes the singularity of the speaker,[44] to the general singular that the expression "the animal" entails: both are self-imposed categories based on difference and differentiation. "Whosoever says 'I' or

42. Derrida, "The Animal," p. 289.
43. Derrida, "The Animal," p. 416.
44. "The 'I' is anybody at all; 'I' am anybody at all, and anybody at all must be able to say 'I' to refer to herself, to his own singularity." Derrida, "The Animal," p. 417.

apprehends or poses herself as an 'I' is a *living animal*."[45] Furthermore, animality, writes Derrida, "is generally defined as sensibility, irritability, and *auto-motricity*, a spontaneity that is capable of movement, of organizing itself and affecting itself, marking, tracing, and affecting itself with traces of its self."[46] The writer who is an autobiographical animal is not only referred to in the general singular, but has similar needs to "the animal": "feeding, food, nursing, breeding, offspring, care and keeping of animals, training, upbringing, culture, living and allowing to live by giving to live, be fed, and grown, autobiographically."[47]

The nameless wordy worm, the narrator of the first chapter of Barnes's *A History* is the ideal autobiographical animal, who is not deprived of language, who is aware of the power of both his/her narrative skills and the stakes of his/her autobiography: a history of the 'I' that challenges traditional conceptions of autobiography while playfully and ironically taking on the rupture between humans and animals.

"My account you can trust" (4), states the worm at the beginning of the story. By this sentence he/she attributes a deeply subjective perspective and takes a deliberately questionable position in relation to his/her own (hi)story. It is clear that we cannot trust the worm. Yet, the narrating worm has a fixation on the trustworthiness of birds, the *avis*, the omen to the people of earlier ages, and a natural predator of worms. For example, the worm states: "I am reporting what the birds said, and the birds could be trusted" (18). Clearly, the trustworthiness of a predator in a power position is dubious. Indeed, in a later chapter in Barnes's *A History*, the narrator and "autobiographical animal" is proven wrong about the birds. Chapter eight, entitled "Upstream," shows that birds are not trustworthy at all: in this chapter the natives, as another step in the questioning of the animal-human divide, teach the innocent and curious European actor the names of the birds in their own language. It turns out that the words memorized were words for genitals, and not birds' names.

45. Derrida, "The Animal," p. 417 (emphasis added).
46. Derrida, "The Animal," p. 417.
47. Derrida, "The Animal," p. 397.

Ágnes Harasztos

Lacanian Subject Formation and Liberal Ideology in Julian Barnes's *The Porcupine*

Introduction

The aim of this essay is to provide an analysis of Julian Barnes's *The Porcupine*[1] (1992) in light of the process of subject formation as described by Lacanian psychoanalysis. The plot of the novel can be interpreted as the emergence of Peter Solinsky as a mature politician, which is analogous to the emergence of the ego in the psychoanalytic system of Jacques Lacan. Solinsky, as the Lacanian subject, is thrown into the world of signifiers defined by Petkanov, a definite father figure for the young solicitor. As an early reviewer of the novel suggested, the two protagonists, Solinksy and Petkanov, are no more than "mere animate arguments with a little flesh on them."[2] Accepting this argument, I will apply Lacan's theory of self-formation also on the level of ideologies represented by the characters in the novel. In a paradigm where Solinksy stands for Liberalism and Petkanov for Communism, Lacanian ego-formation can be seen as an allegory for the genesis of Liberalism, which is always preceded, or fathered (in an Oedipal sense), by an authoritarian ideology, in this case Communism.

1. Petkanov as the Big Other for Solinsky

Jacques Lacan's theory of the evolution of the human psyche has a Freudian basis. In expanding Freud's basically family- or, rather, society-based model, Lacan interpreted ego-formation in accordance with Saussure's linguistic theory. For Lacan, the subject is far from being a

1. All parenthesized references are to this edition: Julian Barnes, *The Porcupine* (London: Picador, 1993).

2. Anthony Lejeune, "The Character Issue," *National Review* 44.24 (1992), 50–52, p. 51.

coherent entity; rather, it is an object of the play of signifiers. In the following, I will examine Solinsky's character development towards becoming a leading political figure in the new liberal democratic order of *The Porcupine*'s unnamed East-Central European country in light of Lacan's theory of self-formation.

For the sake of simplicity, and because of its relevance to the specific fictional character, Solinsky, I will henceforth use the male pronoun in referring to the infant, or developing self. Lacan's theory grants a less biologically determined place for female sexuality than that of Freud. In the Lacanian oeuvre, Freud's sexuality-centred notions such as "phallus" or "desire for the (m)other" gain more symbolic and less sexual significance because Lacan used a primarily linguistic model. However, the Lacanian attitude to femininity has been subject to controversy among scholars within both feminism and psychoanalytic criticism. Some critics, such as Luce Irigaray, hailed his theory as one which provides a less biologically fixed framework for conceptualizing differences of female discourse, while others regarded his thoughts as compliant in the myth of male superiority whether biological or linguistic.[3] Nevertheless, concrete sexual features do not occupy a central position in Lacan's system, and including these problems would direct attention away from the main concern of this paper. Moreover, in most cases, Lacan regards male and female character development as identical in symbolic terms.

1.1 Solinsky in Maternal Harmony with the Community

The first phase of ego formation in Lacan's theory is the original unity of the baby with its mother. This original stage is constitutive of the Lacanian Real, which can sometimes be glimpsed as sparks in the darkness of symbolized existence. This Real is devoid of absences, lacks and gaps, which will later be installed by the Symbolic order.[4]

In Solinsky's process of developing into a politician, this unachievable unity with the maternal other can be arguably seen as analogous to being one with the people. As the infant wishes to unearth the

3. Robin Tamblyn, "Oedipus and Electra: Jacques Lacan and the Feminist Perspective," *The Romulus and Remus Complexes: A Psychoanalytical Appraisal of Sibling Rivalry*, accessed 2 July 2014 <http://romuluscomplex.tripod.com/romulus14.htm>.

4. Adrian Johnston, "Jacques Lacan," *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, accessed 5 June 2013 <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/lacan/>.

desire of the mother to evolve as a true representative subject of their common existence, so does the politician strive to know perfectly the people's needs and to be an authentic representative of them. Lacan suggests that, at this early stage, the baby is faced with a threat: his mother is, compared to the desire of the child, either too withdrawn or too close, never fulfilling his desire entirely. Therefore, the ultimate question posed for the child is how to formulate his self so as to become the object of desire for the mother. The determinative question of this stage is: "What does the (m)other want?"[5] An answer for the maternal puzzle is given by the father at the Oedipal stage, when the child realizes that to be the object of the mother's desire, Lacan's "*object petit a*,"[6] he should accept the "paternal metaphor," and strive to be in the position of his father. It seems that for Solinsky as a Lacanian subject, it is the desire of the people that occupies the place of the maternal puzzle.

It is imperative to clarify at this point that for Lacan, "maternal" and "paternal" are never reified, in a pseudo-Freudian manner, solely as characters of the bourgeois nuclear family.[7] They take their origins from there, but the Lacanian other and Other, in the words of Adrian Johnston, are "psychical-subjective positions, namely, socio-cultural (i.e., non-natural, non-biological) roles."[8] Thus, the people can be placed in the position of the maternal other for Solinsky in Barnes's novel. The infant wishing to constitute his selfhood so as to fulfil the desires of his mother can be paralleled to Solinsky, who desperately seeks to ascertain what the people want. Indeed, the desire of the nation is at the centre of his discussions with Petkanov, who firmly declares himself an expert on the issue. Moreover, Solinsky reflects on his youth when he naively thought he knew what his people needed and what the meaning of politics and its relation to the personal was. This was his political pre-Oedipal stage, when he was in full possession of the answers and dwelt in the secure lap of his being one with the people: "A plump and serious boy in his starched Red Pioneer's uniform" (8), who was convinced that the only true political ideology governs his life and his country.

5. Johnston.
6. Bruce Fink, *The Lacanian Subject: Between Language and Jouissance* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995), p. 59.
7. Johnston.
8. Johnston.

1.2 The Lacanian Mirror Stage and Solinsky's Imaginary Ego(s)

In Lacan's system, the Mirror Stage occurs roughly when the baby is about half a year old, and, by (mis)recognizing his reflection in the mirror, he realizes with the jubilant "Aha" experience that it is himself in the mirror he can see, and readily identifies with this external image. By the imaginary picture of oneself, the ego of the child is constructed as a fictional selfhood, and it will continue to exist in a number of images the person conjures about himself in his fantasies throughout his life. The Mirror Stage is thus not only a stage in the process of self-formation, but is also constitutive of the Lacanian Imaginary Order.[9]

The Imaginary of Lacan is mostly the territory of quotidian reality, where the ego, a series of self-objectified images, interacts with what he imagines other people to be and communicates with what he imagines they mean.[10] The "mirror" in Lacan's system is not exclusively meant in the literal sense. Other people's opinions, speeches or gestures "mirror" back an "image" of oneself in the Imaginary Order.[11] Solinsky's images of his ego are a case in point. They are, strikingly, narrowed down to two, namely those of the "loyal party member and good husband" (36). These two images effectively collapse into one in this highly politicized novel, where private life is only another area of the political. As the narrator muses further: "or was it a good party member and loyal husband? Sometimes the two conditions seemed muddlingly close in his mind" (36). Solinsky is thus a *homo politicus*, whose political image is defined by the public in terms of being the antagonist of the former President, Stoyo Petkanov: "he represented the new order against the old, the future against the past, virtue against vice" (37).

Lacan writes about the Imaginary Order that it is chiefly the territory of dualistic mental representations.[12] It is the stage before the paternal symbolic intermission, where the image of the self and the (m)other will be expanded into a triadic structure with the entrance of the father, the big Other. Lacan's Imaginary characterizes the surface

9. Jacques Lacan, "The Mirror Stage as Formative of the *I* Function," in *Écrits: The First Complete Edition in English*, trans. Bruce Fink (London: W&W Norton Company Inc, 2006), 75–81.
10. Johnston.
11. Johnston.
12. Fink, p. 98.

level of the political discourse in *The Porcupine*. On this level, Petkanov and Solinsky are deeply antagonistic politicians, and the two of them can be described by binary oppositions, the elements of which mutually exclude each other.

1.3 Solinksy in the Symbolic Order

Following the Mirror Stage, the child has to cope with the well-known Oedipal phase. For Lacan, this entails not only a socialization process, but also an intromission into the Symbolic Order characterized by the system of signifiers, most tangibly present in Language. This entails the father's eirenicon; namely the end of the rivalry for the love of the mother. This is the time when the child gets integrated into the symbolic order of the father's society and occupies the place of the father, a place which is signified by his name, by his *Nom du père* in Lacan's terminology.[13] A third party, the father enters into the duality of the self and the (m)other as the big Other, at once barring the access of the self to the maternal other, and offering his own solution to the question of "What does the (m)other want?" The desire for the mother gets substituted by the paternal metaphor and becomes the forever barred and inaccessible signified, or "unconscious." The self becomes part of the signifying chain consciously symbolizing what he originally was.[14] Thus stepping into the world of signifiers, the self as a new signifier appears in place of the Other in the Symbolic Order. It is permitted to enter into the process of signification only on the condition of being fixed in the Symbolic Order (in law, language or social rules): he speaks from the position of the Other. The original self disappears from his original place and appears in the Other's place, which is the place from which he speaks.[15]

Peter Solinsky's approach to Stoyo Petkanov throughout the novel clearly follows the dynamics of a son-and-father relationship. On Solinsky's part, it starts off from the tempestuous teenage fury; it continues with the still hopeful wish for understanding and being understood; and, finally, it ends in the sheer, apathetic and desperate disgust of irreconcilable standpoints. In addition, Petkanov displays thoroughly vulgar features, such as his language and the suggestion

13. Fink, p. 51.
14. Johnston.
15. Jacques Lacan, "Position of the Unconscious," in *Écrits: The First Complete Edition in English*, 703–721, p. 713.

that he raped all the women in the country (16), which makes him appear much like the Freudian Urvater.[16] He is the first signifier, who, in Lacan's theory, is external to the system because he is the person to guarantee the symbolic order[17] in being the enigmatic President and "Father of the People" for the whole Communist era. Petkanov is representative of the collective symbolic order named by Lacan the big Other. He is the one who seems definitely to know what the people want (69), which is the answer to the ultimate desire, and enigma, of Solinsky's political evolution.

As was demonstrated, it is Petkanov who occupies the place of the paternal big Other in Solinksy's evolution into a mature politician. As a next step, the desire for the signified, that is, for the maternal other, should also be pinned down. Lacan suggests that in the Oedipal phase, the child, after renouncing the mother, substitutes his desire for her with the Name of the Father. By this, he enters into the realm of significations and becomes a split subject, symbolized by Lacan by a barred $\$$.[18] This means that with this gesture an inner split occurs in the self, due to which the unconscious, together with consciousness, is born. The very first element in the unconscious is the desire for the mother substituted by the paternal metaphor.[19] A significant diversion of Lacan from Freud is that the big Other does not remain outside the newly formed subject, but retains its power gained through the Oedipal stage and becomes an introject for the subject. The big Other is an inner place, an internalized paternal gaze.[20] Therefore, as Lacan states, we all have the big Other inside ourselves watching us, creating us and forming our desires from within. Lacan's well-known maxim also conveys this meaning: "The man's desire is the desire of the Other."[21]

Based on the analogy established between Lacan's theory and *The Porcupine*, it seems clear that both Solinsky and Petkanov strive to find "true ideology." In their devious ways, both desire to find what the people need and to be a good politician to represent this need

16. Sigmund Freud, *Totem and Taboo: Some Points of Agreement between the Mental Lives of Savages and Neurotics* (London; New York: Routledge, 2001).

17. Jacques Lacan, "Seminar on 'The Purloined Letter,'" in *Écrits: The First Complete Edition in English*, 6–50.

18. Fink, p. 45.

19. Jacques Lacan, "The Subversion of the Subject and the Dialectic of Desire in the Freudian Unconscious," in *Écrits: The First Complete Edition in English*, 671–702.

20. Jacques Lacan, "Kant with Sade," in *Écrits: The First Complete Edition in English*, 645–670.

21. Jacques Lacan, "The Function and Field of Speech in Psychoanalysis," in *Écrits: The First Complete Edition in English*, 196–269, p. 222.

authentically. It seems neither could achieve this goal in its entirety, however. This is the lack which causes their desire never to be fulfilled. Each claims that he knows the answer and has direct access to the signified whereas the other does not. This is what Petkanov refers to when denying Solinsky's maintaining that he is the object of overall hatred by the people: "Lying about me, saying I was only hated and feared, not loved, that will make no difference. You can't get rid of me" (136).

Although Solinsky imagines himself to be radically different from Petkanov, the young man's desires are the same as those of the old man. This is chiefly because Petkanov, mysteriously and rather uncannily, desires in place of Solinsky. It is from the old ex-leader that Solinsky's desires emanate. The mystery of this phenomenon may be explained using Lacanian theory, where Petkanov serves as a paternal metaphor for the value system Solinsky was integrated into. In his final address to the court, the President ironically pleads guilty of sacrificing his life to the nation (122). This holds equally true to Solinsky, whose family, marriage and relationship with his daughter were all destroyed in his desperate attempt to "help expunge that fear" (74) of his nation by carrying out the trial against the Communist leader of the totalitarian era. Petkanov's self-definition seems to match that of Solinksy, as if the young man could not avoid complying with the old leader's expectations about the idea of a good politician. This is what Lacan may refer to in asserting that the ego is the projection of the desire of the Other.[22]

The big Other of Lacan is not confined solely to the paternal Other. Its main function is conveying the language and rules of the Symbolic Order, in which the new subject will formulate its discourse, or, rather, which will discursively formulate the new subject. The Other, in Lacan's system, is ultimately Language.[23] When the self enters the symbolic world of the signifiers, namely Language, he also takes part in the process of signification, and he will hence exist in representations.[24]

When the subject enters into the Symbolic and he expresses himself by way of using its significations, every word he utters has to go through the place (locus) of the Other. In Lacan's view, all speech originates in the unconscious, which came into being right with the gesture of accepting the Symbolic Order of the Other, and the very first

22. Johnston.

23. Jacques Lacan, "The Instance of the Letter in the Unconscious, or Reason Since Freud," in *Écrits: The First Complete Edition in English*, 412–444.

24. Anika Lemaire, *Jacques Lacan*, trans. David Macey (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd, 1977), p. 68.

content of which is the Name of the Father itself.[25] In accordance with this, Lacan states that the "unconscious is the discourse of the Other."[26] When we speak, it is in fact the Other who does so in our place. The Other is our Language.

The subject, as a child, has to accept Language, has to internalize its rules and has to speak the discourse of the Other. This is the condition of our integration into the world of signifiers defined by the Other. Starting his political career, Solinsky also accepted Communism as the system under the aegis of which he could become a politician, and subjected to the rules of which he can signify. The discourse of the system was determined by Stoyo Petkanov, whose speech formed the discourse of the Other for him. Although the whole novel is about Solinsky's desperate fight to disentangle his discourse from that of the ex-President, he finds himself, on the most unexpected occasions, falling into the trap of being unable to avoid speaking the discourse of the Other. These occasions are, strikingly, those when he strives most to set the boundaries between his speech and that of Petkanov. For instance, when defending himself against accusations that, under this new democracy, there is no food in the shops, he refers to the "difficulties inherent in the changeover from a controlled economy to a market economy" (16). In response, Petkanov ironically offers him to re-join the Communist Party because he displayed such excellent command of the old Socialist ways of speaking.

According to Lacan, every signifier originates in the symbolic place of the Other, and, therefore, it disappears from his original place and occupies the locus of the Other.[27] This, again, holds characteristically true for Solinsky, whose "political parricide" (26), that is, his aggressive way towards political power, and the personal transformation that it entails are the central themes of *The Porcupine*. Even in his accusations of Petkanov, Solinsky repeats the ex-leader's discourse. The charges of corruption, a bourgeois lifestyle, favouritism or holding Swiss bank accounts (60) represent resentment of those deeds that are typically considered objectionable from a Socialist point of view.

Although Solinsky does not seem to be an exception in speaking the Language of the Other as embodied in the figure of Petkanov, he is desperate in his efforts to disentangle himself from Petkanov's discourse. He repeatedly expresses his nausea at having to listen to what he calls Petkanov's "cheap analogies" (68), and at the way Petkanov corrupted

25. Johnston.
26. Lacan, "The Function," p. 232.
27. Lacan, "Position," p. 713.

even the words people are left to use after him (133). Consequently, he is determined to change what he finds deeply corrupted, mendacious and tyrannical in the newly subverted Communist system. Therefore, he proposes a new "true ideology," that of Liberalism, with its new values of freedom, democracy and capitalist economy. However, throughout the novel we are witnesses to the process of Solinsky slowly but inevitably occupying the Lacanian locus of the Other in every respect.

The famous Lacanian paraphrase of Descartes illustrates how the Other unconsciously leaks through the deeds, speech and thoughts of the self: "I think where I am not, therefore I am where I think not."[28] Thinking, thus, happens in the unconscious, at the locus of the Other, because the Other thinks and speaks in place of the subject. Moreover, as the Lacanian philosopher Slavoy Žižek suggested, "the unconscious is outside, crystallized in institutionalized practices,"[29] which means that the Other's operations are so banal, and we are so deeply socialized in its rules, that we do not even recognize its effects.

Solinsky faces the most crucial choice in his life concerning his emergence as a politician when he is to decide whether to utilize in the trial the hazy, half-constructed evidence of the President's supposed permission to assassinate his own daughter. On this momentous occasion, his lapsing into a new version of a show trial prosecutor who acts according to his strong political conviction instead of independent evidence is rather unconscious. Immediately, he starts using the style of Petkanov. He himself muses about a so-called cheap analogy he unconsciously utters (51) as he decodes the Socialist discourse of the text of the memorandum without difficulty: "The Prosecutor General read it slowly, discarding the jargon automatically as he went" (91). What is more, although he entered the novel as a devoted sceptic, at this moment he turns into a Petkanov-style believer for the sake of some ideological purpose: "The document is true, even if it is a forgery. Even if it isn't true, it is necessary" (113).

Finally, the fact that there are only the initials S. P. on the document Solinsky is using as evidence that Petkanov murdered the Minister of Culture may be considered as a visual representation of Solinsky's development turning Petkanov inside out. Solinsky himself is slowly becoming what he so desperately fought against but what is as deeply rooted in his political genesis as the Father in that of a child, or the Lacanian Other in that of the subject. This is aptly worded by the

28. Lacan, "The Instance of the Letter," p. 430.

29. Christopher Hanlon, "Psychoanalysis and the Post-Political: An Interview with Slavoj Žižek," *New Literary History* 32.1 (2001), 1–21, p. 6.

ex-president himself on their last meeting: "Either I am a monster, or I am not. Yes? If I am not, then I must be someone like you, or someone you might be capable of becoming" (135).

The Other is an inexhaustible source of mystery to the self.[30] For Solinsky, this Other is definitely Petkanov: he "reflected that his plan of getting to know Petkanov, the better to predict his moves, had so far made little progress. Would he ever come to grasp the man's character?" (66) In the novel, the Prosecutor does not provide any answer to Petkanov's double-ended question. However, were there any answer to it in Lacan's oeuvre, it would be that Petkanov is both a monster and an ordinary person. On the one hand, he is the monster of the mysterious and inscrutable Other, whose presence in the institution and Language Solinsky relies on is external, while on the other hand he is also the monster whom Solinsky recognizes inside himself, never fully to be dislodged. Thus, following from the logic of the Lacanian Symbolic Order, if Solinsky wishes to maintain his narcissistic ideal image in the Lacanian Imaginary Order, he either has to consider himself a Monster, along with Petkanov, or accept Petkanov as an ordinary man similar to himself.

2. The Genesis of Liberalism

If interpreted within the Symbolic Order posited by Lacan, the protagonist of *The Porcupine* is revealed to be entangled in a relationship with what he perceives in the realm of the Imaginary as the great, antagonistic evil whom he fights. Petkanov, his speech and his desire seem to infiltrate Solinsky's formation as a mature politician: Petkanov emerges as Solinsky's Lacanian Other. In search of a further possible implication of this finding, we might move one step back from the narrative level and adopt Anthony Lejeune's suggestion that *The Porcupine* has a facet similar to morality plays, in which Petkanov and Solinsky are ideologies "with a little flesh on them."[31] Vanessa Guignery also argues that *The Porcupine* refers to universal meta-narratives such as Communism and Liberalism.[32] Barnes creates this effect of the

30. Slavoy Žižek, "From *Che vuoi?* to Fantasy: Lacan with *Eyes Wide Shut*," *How to Read Lacan*, accessed 28 September 2014 <http://www.lacan.com/essays/?p=146>.

31. Lejeune, p. 51.

32. Vanessa Guignery, "Untangling the Intertwined Threads of Fiction and Reality in *The Porcupine* (1992)," in *Pre- and Post-Publication Itineraries of the Contemporary Novel in English* (Paris: Éditions Publibook Université, 2007), 49–67, p. 57.

morality play by utilizing the two main characters as mouthpieces. Consequently, the question arises whether the relationship of Solinsky and Petkanov outlined under the aegis of Lacanian psychoanalysis could have more general implications regarding authoritarian ideologies such as Communism versus Liberalism.

Along the suggested analogy, it might be presumed that Liberalism is related to authoritarian ideologies such as Communism in the fashion that the subject is related to the Lacanian Other of the Symbolic Order. Within Lacanian theory, this idea entails firstly that Liberalism has to face an authoritarian unconscious, an authoritarian gaze inside its realm of self-definition. Secondly, the suggestion arises that authoritarian ways of thinking always precede, father, and often define liberal discourses as the Other's desire defines the subject. Moreover, liberal ideology speaks in the Language of authoritarian ideology, supposing that the assumption has some relevance. To prove that such a more general interpretation is possible, at first the dichotomy represented by Peter Solinsky and Stoyo Petkanov in Barnes's novel should be explored in detail.

The dichotomy of the two protagonists can be defined in terms of various interrelated notions which characterize the ideologies of authoritarian and liberal systems of thinking. Their relation as that of son and father has already been discussed. Another dimension is the contrast between the intellectual and the peasant. The basis of Solinsky's more pondering and hesitating attitude is the acceptance of the possibility that different interpretations may be of equal validity, that there may be more than one side to any issue. In contrast, Petkanov is never bothered by doubt about his own firmly represented thoughts; he considers them the only acceptable side to the issue in question. Petkanov, the old leader himself strengthens this aspect of their contrast when grumbling at the overly intellectual, emphatically uncertain demeanour of Solinsky, and also that of his father: "That was just like old Solinsky, always trying to play the fucking intellectual" (131). Yet, Petkanov is a typical peasant figure, who made a cult of strength, who "despised illness" (78), and who never faltered in his decisions. Strength and weakness serve as another significant binary opposition, adding a further dimension to the contrast of authoritative thinking and Liberalism. As Julian Barnes asserted, in this novel he wanted to show "the weakness of Liberalism confronted by the certainty of a system that believes it has all the answers."[33] Accordingly, the dichotomy

33. Vanessa Guignery and Ryan Roberts, eds. *Conversations with Julian Barnes* (Mississippi: University Press of Mississippi, 2009), p. 46.

of belief and scepticism is also characteristic of the contrast between Petkanov and Solinsky. Solinsky started his political career by trying to restore his nation's "capacity for scepticism, for useful doubt" (27), while Petkanov is a "true believer in Socialism and Communism," who "never wavered from the path" (130).

In the course of Barnes's novel, Solinsky, the representative of liberal values, gradually finds himself in the position of speaking the discourse and fulfilling the desire of Petkanov, the representative of authoritarian thinking. Petkanov's attitude filters through Solinsky's mind when he decides that "[i]t is equally important that the accused be found guilty" (93), or when he suggests that "[h]e must practise saying *Yes* and *No* and *That's stupid* and *Go away*" (51), namely that he must cease deliberation. In short, Petkanov is the unavoidable inner gaze of the Other for Solinsky, whose significations are saturated with those of the Communist leader. "Petkanov is embedded in the soul of Solinsky and his generation,"[34] as one of the reviewers of the book wrote, leading to the assumption that the same holds true for the ideologies of which they serve as mouthpieces. Liberalism in general cannot exist without the shadow of authoritarian ideology if it aims at pinning down unquestionable truths, declaring firm stands, sentencing behaviours or views. Unshakeable belief in one's own truth while discarding those of the other can also be added to the list of the authoritarian Other's manifestation in Liberalism.

Lacan states that everything said by the self necessarily passes through the locus of the Other.[35] Liberal discourse might also be argued to speak the language of authoritarian ideologies. Liberal ideas such as freedom of thought can only be understood against the background of constrained thought, the idea of independence only makes sense if there is something to be independent from. By tolerating many approaches to an issue, the liberal thinker cannot avoid assigning priority to his own. Otherwise, by accepting many sides, Liberalism, paradoxically, would annihilate its own point which is, after all, one steady viewpoint, it cannot be many in itself. By excluding all but its own view, Liberalism gives way to the germ of authoritarianism. Therefore, it is possible to conclude that at the genesis of Liberalism there stands some sort of authoritarian ideology fulfilling the role of the Lacanian big Other. In historical terms, the authoritarian "fathers" of liberal systems could have appeared in the forms of Feudalism, Absolutism, or

34. Francis Maier, "*The Porcupine*," *America* 168.21 (1993), 22–23, p. 23.
35. Johnston.

Communism. No matter which, authoritarian signification is embedded in Liberalism in general. However, it is imperative to establish that the idea outlined above is far from "suggesting nearly moral equivalence between Bolshevism and Liberalism,"[36] as it was ascribed to the novel by Merritt Moseley. I argue that the novel suggests an unavoidable authoritarian presence in Liberalism, but it never posits them on the same moral level. Moreover, the basis of the argumentation in this paper is Lacanian psychoanalysis, which never equates the subject (Liberalism) with its big Other (authoritarianism).

Conclusion

The first conclusion to be drawn refers to the narrative level of Julian Barnes's *The Porcupine*. The protagonist Peter Solinsky's travel towards becoming a politician is claimed to be analogous to the journey of the self into the world of symbolic significations as described in Jacques Lacan's theory of self-formation. The pre-linguistic, pre-Oedipal maternal unity for him proved to be his naive youthful certainty concerning the truth of Communist ideology and his own sense of being one with what was claimed to be the People in Communist discourse.

On the level of Lacan's Imaginary Order, Solinsky is perceived as the antagonist of Petkanov, representing the new order as opposed to the old one. However, on close investigation, it turns out that instead of being Solinsky's antagonist, Petkanov rather symbolizes a system of signifiers, or, in Lacanian terms, the "paternal metaphor." The novel is about the Prosecutor General's desperate but hopeless struggle to be disentangled from the paternal Other embodied in the old ex-president. Finally, Solinsky turns out to be unable to avoid speaking the discourse of Petkanov or formulating his own self as an *object petit a* of the desire of the Other. As a result, he unconsciously surrenders in the fight and submits himself to Petkanov's speech and symbolic order. As a mature subject, who is a politican, Solinsky occupies the place of the Other, with all the consequences this entails.

A broader interpretation of Solinsky's evolution might be that Liberalism, the ideology he represents in the world of the novel, is related to authoritarian ideologies such as Communism the way the

36. Merritt Moseley, *Understanding Julian Barnes* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1997), p. 150.

Lacanian subject is related to the all-embracing inner outsider, the Lacanian Other. In order to investigate Liberalism in its relation to authoritarianism, *The Porcupine* relocates the genesis of Western-type democracy in the laboratory of the historical time of the 1989 changes in Eastern Europe, where it was fathered by Communism. However, the relevance of Barnes's novel cannot be restricted to a fable about the fate of Liberalism in Eastern-Europe. Although *The Porcupine* is also about Eastern-Europe, I believe it carries relevance to more global issues.

Authoritarian discourse seems to determine the validity of liberal discourse; intermittently, it seems to leak through the dams of Liberalism revealing the authoritarian unconscious of Liberalism itself. As Petkanov says to Solinsky at the end of the novel: "You cannot get rid of me" (136). To apply Lacan's famous aphorism for the relation of Liberalism and authoritarianism: Liberalism thinks at the place defined by an authoritarian system. By positing these two fundamental ideological attitudes vested in dichotomies arranged along the axes of father-son, peasant-intellectual, and believer-sceptic (which correspond to the Lacanian Imaginary oppositions), Barnes's novel suggests that authoritarianism bears ancestral, even atavistic characteristics, in contrast to Liberalism, which represents the more modern and more derivative side. What Lacanian theory adds to this duality is the system of significations provided by the big Other (Petkanov and Communism) for the ever filial subject (Solinsky and Liberalism). This subject cannot help speaking the discourse of the Other, thinking in the locus of the Other, and possibly finally occupying the place of the Other, as rebellious sons become fathers, and young liberals revert to power positions, which, in a certain sense, inevitably involve authoritarian practices. What Barnes's novel reveals, with the aid of Jacques Lacan's thoughts, is as much a recurring generational cycle as a specific socio-historical issue concerning Europe in the 1990s, and also a symbolic structure of patterns of thinking.

Péter Tamás

"If I Were a Dictator of Fiction"

Readerly and Writerly Anxiety of Influence in Julian Barnes's *Flaubert's Parrot*

"Like criticism, which is either part of literature or nothing at all, great writing is always at work strongly (or weakly) misreading previous writing."[1] This quotation, taken from Harold Bloom's preface to the second edition of *The Anxiety of Influence*, could provide a useful framework to an analysis of the most highly acclaimed work of Julian Barnes, *Flaubert's Parrot*[2] (1984). This quasi-biographical novel,[3] as has been noted numerous times, blends fiction and criticism to an extent which might justify the first part of Bloom's statement, that criticism is part of literature. Due to Barnes's witty style, however, the book has rarely been mentioned in relation to misreading Flaubert. And since there is no doubt that Barnes appreciates Flaubert – he has shown deep respect for him both in his interviews and in his essays – interpretations tend to take little notice of the resistant forces working in the text. It seems to me, however, that the novel's protagonist-narrator recounts a wrestling with Flaubert's legacy in order to establish his authority as a writer – a task which demands a misprision of Flaubert's life and works, a rethinking of the connection between fiction and reality, and a specific way of constructing the reader.

Although Bloom based his theory on poetry and states that Shakespeare is left out of the first (original) version of his text due to "the contrast between dramatic and lyric form,"[4] there is no reason why we should not apply his notions to novels as well. After all, the preface to the second edition seems to redefine its focus more permissively: "influence-anxiety [...] is an anxiety achieved in and by the story, novel, play, poem or essay."[5] Indeed, there are some prominent

1. Harold Bloom, "Preface," in *The Anxiety of Influence*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), xi–xlvii, p. xix.

2. All parenthesized references are to this edition: Julian Barnes, *Flaubert's Parrot* (London: Picador, 1985).

3. I will refer to the text as a novel despite the obvious problems of its classification. For an overview of this question, see Vanessa Guignery, *The Fiction of Julian Barnes: A Reader's Guide to Essential Criticism*, Readers' Guides to Essential Criticism (Basingstoke; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), pp. 37–40.

4. Bloom, p. 11.

5. Bloom, p. xxiii.

parallels between Bloom's and Barnes's works: *Flaubert's Parrot* is "obsessed with the problem of loss"[6] in the same way that literature is in the Bloomian concept. According to *The Anxiety of Influence*, poetry, since Milton, takes "as its obsessive theme the power of the mind over the universe of death."[7] This universe of death threatens both in the form of mortality, the poet's own physical vulnerability, and in the form of the posthumous influence of a literary predecessor. The two levels of Barnes's novel embody these very forms: Geoffrey Braithwaite, the narrator of the novel, mixes the estimation of Flaubert's literary legacy with the story of his dead wife, Ellen. The interpretations of Flaubert's life and works are motivated by a desire to find an explanation for Ellen's suicide, but even Flaubert cannot provide the answer to that question. This, in a sense, proves that the oeuvre of Geoffrey's admired literary master is deficient, which gives Braithwaite[8] the possibility to create an authentic, artistic text of his own.

As he is striving to achieve an authorial status, Braithwaite's work starts to use some of those rhetorical strategies to overcome influence-anxiety that Bloom enumerates. This can be witnessed on the macro levels of the novel as a gradual change in the narrator's style, but also on its micro levels, insofar as *Flaubert's Parrot* borrows certain motifs from *Madame Bovary*,[9] only to elaborate on them more profoundly than its predecessor has done. By using these motifs, Braithwaite acknowledges their appropriateness, but by providing additional "meanings" to them, he suggests that his "precursor had failed to go far enough,"[10] which is how Bloom describes *Tessera*, an anxious device.

The first of the two motifs I wish to mention is the club foot, taken from the scene when, in the hope that it would gain fame for him, Charles Bovary operates on the club-footed Hippolyte, who eventually loses his leg because of the doctor's unprofessionalism. One piece of criticism *Madame Bovary* has received, sharp if not necessarily deserved, is that the scene in question is not integrated tightly enough into the texture of the novel.[11] Considering this, it is of special importance that *Flaubert's Parrot* evokes this very scene and uses the image

6. Frederick M. Holmes, *Julian Barnes*, New British Fiction (Basingstoke; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), p. 72.

7. Bloom, p. 34.

8. Rather than Barnes. See footnote 22.

9. All parenthesized references (*MB*) are to this edition: Gustave Flaubert, *Madame Bovary: A Story of Provincial Life*, trans. Alan Russell (London: Penguin Books, 1950).

10. Bloom, p. 14.

11. "In the larger aspects of form he was not, in fact, consistently successful; he relied on 'style' to neutralize certain faults of construction he knew to be present, such as the shift of emphasis from Charles to Emma or the obtrusion of the club-foot inci-

of the club-foot in a context which is similar but not identical to the original:

> The age he [Flaubert] lived in was stupid; the new age, brought in by the Franco-Prussian war, would be even stupider. Of course some things would change: the spirit of Homais was winning. Soon everybody with a club foot would be entitled to a misconceived operation which would lead to an amputated leg. (93–4)

In *Madame Bovary*, the sight of Hippolyte is a memento of Charles Bovary's lack of professional skills and his mediocrity; Braithwaite takes this metaphor and extends it to a whole age. This is not much of an alteration, but further variations on the club-foot image appear elsewhere in the text, with greatly modified "meaning." If he were "a dictator of fiction," Geoffrey explains, he would permit coincidences only in the picaresque: "let the virtuous pauper with the gangrenous foot discover the buried treasure – it's all right, it doesn't really matter" (71). He reports that in the penultimate year of his life, Flaubert "had rheumatism and a swollen foot" (65) – which has resonances in later parts of the text, one instance depicting a dying "Rimbaud, his right leg amputated" (200), the other describing that the left leg of Flaubert's statue at Barentin "is beginning to split" (227).

The remaining two evocations of the unfortunate Hippolyte's club foot refer to Flaubert and art, which may help find the reason for this obsession with the motif: "Do you want art to tell the truth? Send for the AMBULANCE FLAUBERT: though don't be surprised, when it arrives, if it runs over your leg" (160–1). In accordance with the metaphor, not only does the literary master possess the truth, he also lames "you." This has strong resonances to the Oedipus complex, or, more precisely, to its Bloomian version, in which a poet's predecessors have always already expressed "poetic wisdom,"[12] crippling the later poet with a desire to somehow usurp this wisdom. The use of the motif, then, provides meaning to a part of *Madame Bovary* over which even Flaubert lost control. This new meaning is a subconscious one, a trace or a symptom of Braithwaite's desire to assume the place and authority of Flaubert. Accordingly, towards the end of the novel, the Oedipal club foot appears as a direct quotation from one of Flaubert's letters: "Even what art *is* escapes them. They find the annotations more interesting

dent." Alan Russell, "Introduction," in Gustave Flaubert, *Madame Bovary: A Story of Provincial Life*, 5–12, p. 8.

12. Bloom, p. 13.

than the text. They set more store by the crutches than the legs" (208). The lame annotator, Braithwaite himself, has to lean on the crutches of his commentary, but succeeds in stealing the sentence of his precursor and in transforming it. Flaubert's confident scorn is turned into ambiguous irony, as in this new context the primary work's replacement by the annotations can be regarded both as the narrator's self-ironic remark and as an example of *Tessera*.

The other motif borrowed from *Madame Bovary*, and even more elaborately rewritten in Braithwaite's text, is imagination. By imagination I mean a sort of lazy daydreaming, closely associated with fiction, which serves as a substitute for the life that the characters have failed to live. Emma, stuck in a marriage which is only the shadow of what she longs for, constructs an imaginary, narcissistic world by reading literature. Though at first she did not know "exactly what was meant in life by the words 'bliss', 'passion', 'ecstasy', which had looked so beautiful in books" (*MB* 47), she soon begins to seek in poems, women's papers, Balzac "and Georges Sand a vicarious gratification of her own desires" (*MB* 71). This fictional world is where her seducers enter, linking adultery to reading: "She invented relations between him [the Viscount] and the fictional characters" (*MB* 71), comments the narrator as Emma yields to passion. The "kind bond" (*MB* 112) between Emma and Léon is also formed with the aid of literature: "Often she asked him to recite some poetry" (*MB* 111). This theatricality saturates the romance to the extent that the couple perceive each other as literary figures; early in the novel, Léon manages to attract Emma's attention by sharing his reading experiences: "You travel in your chair through countries you seem to see before you, your thoughts are caught up in the story, dallying with the details or following the course of plot, you enter into the characters, so that it seems as if it were your own heart beating beneath their costumes" (*MB* 96). This description proves to be prophetic, for during their romance Léon will think of her as a fictional entity, as a literary character, who hides Emma's heart beneath its costume:

> In the variety of her moods, by turns gay and otherworldly, garrulous and taciturn, fiery and indifferent, she provoked a thousand desires in him, appealed both to his instincts and his memories. She was the "woman of love" of all the novels, the heroine of all drama, the shadowy "she" of all the poetry-books. (*MB* 276)

Whereas *Madame Bovary* makes a clear distinction between the realm of fiction and that of actual life, and punishes, so to speak, the transgression of these borders with a fate which is either tragic (in the case of Emma) or squalid (in the case of Léon), *Flaubert's Parrot* re-examines this separation. In Barnes's novel, "[m]ade-up characters are treated as though they were real, and, conversely, real people are rendered fictional."[13] The latter category would include Flaubert, Louise Colet, prof. Enid Starkie and prof. Christopher Ricks, while Geoffrey Braithwaite would fall into the former category, as Barnes refers to him as a real person: "The translations in this book are by Geoffrey Braithwaite" (viii), reads the note before the table of contents. Braithwaite even quotes a sentence from his creator's first novel, *Metroland* and, as has been noted by many critics, corrects a factual mistake,[14] which emphasizes a passage through ontological levels. *Flaubert's Parrot* signals how important these border crossings are for Geoffrey as early as in the first paragraph:

> Six North Africans were playing boule beneath Flaubert's statue. […] With a final, ironic caress from the fingertips, a brown hand dispatched a silver globe. […] The thrower remained a stylish, temporary statue: knees not quite unbent, and the right hand ecstatically spread. (1)

The North Africans, real persons in the fictitious world of the novel, are turned into statues by the (Bloomian) presence of the dead writer's statue, but their status as real or fictional can be reversed: these six boule players are fictional in the sense that they exist only in this very novel, whereas Flaubert is a historical figure.

The narrator's struggle for an authoritative voice and his anxiety of influence are not only initiators of speculations on the borders of reality and fiction, they also shape the conclusions Geoffrey comes to. Although certain statements of the novel seem to recreate *Madame Bovary*'s strict distinction between the two worlds – "Books are not life, however much we might prefer if they were" (5) – their reliability

13. Alison Lee, *Realism and Power: Postmodern British Fiction* (London: Routledge, 1990), p. 46.

14. "I read the other day a well-praised first novel in which the narrator […] comically rehearses to himself the best way to kiss a girl without being rebuffed: 'With a slow, sensual, irresistible strength, draw her gradually towards you while gazing into her eyes as if you had just been given a copy of the first, suppressed edition of *Madame Bovary*.' I thought this was quite neatly put […] The only trouble is, there's no such thing as a 'first, suppressed edition of *Madame Bovary*'." (85)

is questioned by the intrusion of the fear to replicate the predecessor's views. Braithwaite has to manage the contradiction that while he is reading Flaubert's fiction in order to find answers to some of the greatest questions of life, his own interest as an author is to conclude that Flaubert's oeuvre does not contain any answers, otherwise he would have to acknowledge being a faint echo of his precursor, parroting the truth(s) discovered by Flaubert. This conflict between Braithwaite's readerly and writerly roles finds an accurate description in Bloom's statement that the "poet *in every reader* does not experience the same disjunction from what he reads that the critic in every reader necessarily feels. What gives pleasure to the critic in a reader may give anxiety to the poet in him."[15] However, the work of the influence-anxiety is not confined to this single paradox. Both the devout and the iconoclastic approaches to Flaubert, reading, respectively, a successful and an unsuccessful quest for truth into the precursor's novels, presuppose a crossing from literature to life. Yet Braithwaite is in no situation to confirm this crossing, for in that case he would become a twentieth-century counterpart of Emma Bovary – another person who mistakenly believes that reality and books are related, and who is a bad reader: she is "of a sentimental rather than an artistic temperament," as Flaubert's narrator makes it clear (*MB* 49). Still, in a sense, his partial identification with Emma comes in handy for Geoffrey, since it creates a distance between him and Charles Bovary. Both being doctors and cuckolds, they are easily associated, and this equivalence causes another form of influence-anxiety: Geoffrey's whole life can be seen as the work of Flaubert. Braithwaite's fear of resembling a fictitious character can be connected to Bloom's description of Thomas Mann's real relation to "mythical identification."[16] In his essay "Freud and the Future," Mann embraces Goethe's version of the "ego of antiquity" for its allowing life to become "imitation," a "reanimation of the hero under very different temporal and personal conditions."[17] For Bloom, this appraisal is highly suspicious; he concludes that the cheerful tone is a deceit and that Mann reads "precisely his own parodistic genius, his own kind of loving irony, into his precursor."[18] It could be claimed that Geoffrey conceals a similar fear of "mythical identification" and also tries to overcome it by seemingly embracing it. His unique treatment of this

15. Bloom, p. 25.
16. Bloom, pp. 53–4.
17. Thomas Mann, "Freud and the Future," *Daedalus* 88.2 (1959), 374–378, pp. 375, 377.
18. Bloom, pp. 53–4.

fear is, on the one hand, to exaggerate the identification by embodying not only one but two characters (Emma and Charles Bovary), and, on the other hand, to only partially identify with them: he never endorses crossing the channel between reality and fiction in as unreflected a fashion as Emma does, and as to Emma's husband, knowing that "[i]n any case Charles was not one to go to the root of things" and that he "shrank" from any proof of Emma's infidelity (*MB* 353), Braithwaite distinguishes himself from the character by emphasising that he is not afraid of seeking those proofs – if only after Ellen's suicide: "I loved Ellen, and I wanted to know the worst" (147). Presenting himself as a more profound version of Flaubert's characters, he corrects their flaws, and, to use Bloom's term, completes them antithetically.

However, there is one aspect of crossing the borders of fiction and reality which Geoffrey does not discuss and which, consequently, is all the more significant: he is repeatedly addressing the reader. As a possible explanation for this covert strategy, I take up Bloom's notion that a strong poet needs his own *ephebe* for cementing his position in the canon; in Bloom's words, the strong poet "must wait for his Son, who will define him even as he has defined his own Poetic Father."[19] My argument is that Geoffrey chooses the reader as his heir, and the rest of my paper will try to track the way he gradually constructs an audience of his own in an effort to establish his writerly authority.

In the first chapter, Braithwaite might seem to be a potential writer when he mentions that "I thought of writing books myself once," but he proceeds to explain why he is not worried about his unwritten books by reviewing some of Flaubert's ideas, relying on what "Flaubert implies" and what "Flaubert knew" (3–4). Because of that, the narrator appears rather as an admirer of the French writer, as someone who has to quote his idol to express his own thoughts. This impression is intensified when the reader learns that Geoffrey went on a mission to find the authentic model of Loulou, the parrot in "Un coeur simple," after he had come across two stuffed parrots in different museums, both of which were exhibited as the real model. The search for Loulou's real-life counterpart initiates Braithwaite's biography on Flaubert. This chapter is followed by a section containing three chronologies, one – and this might be surprising – focusing on Flaubert's failures. But the first real withdrawal from the admirer status occurs in the third chapter. Here, Geoffrey meets a comparably enthusiastic fellow scholar, Ed Winterton, who serves as a mirror for him. Seeing

19. Bloom, p. 37.

a tiresome man, who he feels is too much concerned about how much "we owe these fellers [...] in return" of their literary output (41), Braithwaite is forced to redefine his relationship to his own master. Compared to Ed's motives for pursuing a writer, Geoffrey's motives are not transcendental but personal, almost narcissistic. What forces him to write Flaubert's biography is not an ethical demand but an obsession, some kind of urge to discover the unknown. Although there are moments in the book when Geoffrey talks about what Flaubert would (supposedly) have wished to happen after his death,[20] his account of the phenomenon which prompts the investigation of the writer's life points only to curiosity: "After I got home the duplicate parrots continued to flutter in my mind" (15).

When Ed (inadvertently?) misleads Geoffrey into believing that he will have the opportunity to publish evidence that Flaubert indeed had an affair with Juliet Herbert, the mysterious governess, Braithwaite interrupts their dialogue with this reflection: "Dear old Gustave, I murmured to myself; I felt quite tender towards him" (44). When he learns, however, that Ed has burnt the entire correspondence, this tender attitude towards the writer is quickly changed. Upon asking Ed – whom he now sees as "this criminal, this sham, this failure, this murderer, this bald pyromaniac" (46) – why he destroyed the letters, he gets the answer that this was what Flaubert had wanted. Braithwaite has doubts about it, but reminds himself that "Gustave did burn much of his correspondence with Du Camp" (46–7), too. Disappointed that he will not be known as the one who solved the case of Juliet Herbert, Geoffrey continues his train of thought: "Or perhaps he [Flaubert] didn't want us to know that his famous devotion to solitude and art had nearly been overthrown. But the world would know. I would tell it, one way or another" (47). Having identified with Flaubert two pages earlier, now the narrator consciously ignores the writer's will. Ed claims he "was sure" (45) that Geoffrey would understand, and if Ed is sincere, he mistakes Braithwaite's zeal, which is a combination of curiosity and ambition, for the admiration and responsibility he himself feels towards his own beloved author, Gosse. It is also worth noting that Geoffrey narrates the scene without warning the reader where it leads to, which means that we have to go through the same experience that he did. This is the first moment of the book when readers find themselves openly manipulated.

20. "He died little more than a hundred years ago, and all that remains of him is paper. [...] This, as it happens, is precisely what he would have wanted" (2). "And what do people think of him now? [...] Flaubert would hardly have been surprised at the lazy rush to understand" (95–6).

The next turning point comes in the seventh chapter. Erica Hateley notes that this chapter, titled "Cross Channel," "represents a movement or transition both literally and metaphorically" and that "[f]rom this point on, Braithwaite is much more interested in the 'unspoken' or 'potential' elements of Flaubert than the known or familiar"[21]; in other words, in the gaps he can "fill" as a writer. In the remaining chapters, he will find many gaps – as is only fair for somebody who said that one could "define a net [...] with no great injury to logic" as "a collection of holes tied together with string" (35) – but there is another important indicator that Geoffrey is developing an authorial voice: he starts to construct his readers. Evidently, he has addressed his readers before numerous times in the book, but only with passing remarks. Here, he creates roles for them:

> As for the hesitating narrator – look, I'm afraid you've run into one right now. It might be because I'm English. You'd guessed that, at least – that I'm English? I... I... Look at that seagull up there. [...] Why don't we meet on the boat back instead? The two o' clock ferry, Thursday? I'm sure I'll feel more like it then. All right? What? No, you can't come on deck with me. For God's sake. Besides, I'm going to the lavatory first. I can't have you following me in there, peering round from the next stall. (100)

Naturally, this interaction is one-sided: the reader has no choice but to become a voyeur, peering round from the next stall. This first example also shows that Geoffrey constructs his reader as an act of self-defense: it is to conceal his embarrassment that he first uses this device. To ensure he has a true writer's control over his text, he will prove to be more of a manipulative narrator than a hesitating one – although there is an irony to this part of the text, for Braithwaite starts to hesitate right after he refers to himself as a hesitating narrator, which could exemplify the performative aspect of language. As Geoffrey continues his narration, however, his attempts to distance himself from Flaubert and thus achieve an authorial status become more determined. He writes "Louise Colet's Version" of the French master's life, which gives him an opportunity to claim – with the voice of Flaubert's lover, a reasonably trustworthy source[22] – that Gustave did not understand the

21. Erica Hateley, "Flaubert's Parrot as Modernist Quest," *Q/W/E/R/T/Y: Arts, Litteratures & Civilisations du Monde Anglophone* 11 (2001), 177–181, pp. 179–80.

22. Since Barnes himself took a more careful and reflective approach to the credibility of Louise Colet than Braithwaite did (reminding us that both Flaubert's and

human heart. The Louise Colet whose words Geoffrey mediates in this chapter (more precisely, the Louise Colet he himself performs or creates) demands the readers' attention ("Now hear my story. I insist"), addresses them as if they were "frightened of" what she "might have to *say*" about Flaubert, and ensures the audience that "it's too late now. You have taken my arm; you cannot drop it. After all, I am older than you. It is your job to protect me" (162). The last sentence of the quotation not only creates a new role for the reader (as the knightly protector of Louise Colet), it also suggests that the reader should help her in representing her case, clearing her from the accusations of a posterity partial to Flaubert. In this task, Geoffrey gets the active role, the reader the passive one: Colet's feelings are voiced by Geoffrey, and Louise needs the reader only to listen, just as Geoffrey needs a passive, gullible listener/reader so that he can become an absolute authority.

Braithwaite, having impersonated a female character (much like Flaubert had done with Emma – "Madame Bovary, c'est moi"), tries to outdo his master once more by completing "Braithwaite's Dictionary of Accepted Ideas," a work he has been writing at least since the ninth chapter, where he first mentions his "pocket guide to Flaubert" (138). Eventually, swerving away from Flaubert completely, he proceeds to tell the story of his wife's adultery and suicide. This chapter, titled "Pure Story," has been analyzed numerous times, and I wish to comment only on its title. Taking the risk of being seen as a manipulative author, however, I will wait with those comments, and first discuss the last two chapters, which complete the iconoclastic misprision of Flaubert's legacy and the placement of Braithwaite over the reader as an authoritative figure.

The fourteenth chapter imitates an examination paper and offers a new reading contract. The mere fact that the book's narrator composes an examination paper suggests that he is an authority on Flaubert, holding answers to questions not only about Flaubert (Section A), but also about phenomena like "Logic (with Medicine)" or Geography (Section B), to which Flaubert is presented as the key or, rather, as just an example which can facilitate understanding these issues. Flaubert is no longer treated as a source of secret knowledge: the scientific background of one of his *bon mots* is shown to be outdated by today's standards ("spleen [...] is as indispensable to our bodily organism as

Colet's accounts are highly biased, he contrasts them with each other), I do not think of the novel as an imprint of Barnes's own anxiety of influence but as an illustration of the phenomenon which Harold Bloom discusses. See Julian Barnes, *Something to Declare: Essays on France and French Culture* (London: Picador, 2002), p. 188.

poetry is to our mental organism," claimed Flaubert, but "the spleen is no longer regarded as an essential organ" (209–10), which ruins the simile), and we see him being influenced by, not holding answers to, nonliterary aspects of life (i.e., he is affected by geography: the "soporific atmosphere" of the region "contributed greatly to the slowness and difficulty with which Flaubert worked" (209)).

The reader's presentation has been changed as well. S/he is constructed as an examined student: an unequal person, having no possibility to express personal views since "[a]ll marks will be awarded for the correctness of answers; none for presentation," and since "facetious or conceitedly brief answers" (204) will be punished – even if Geoffrey's interpretations could be appropriately described by the word "facetious." Of course, we can suppose that Braithwaite ironically attaches this mock examination paper to demonstrate the impossibility of answering questions concerning literary criticism (Section A) or anything else (Section B). But even in that case, this chapter signals that the narrator has finished his portrait of Flaubert, and the inherent irony of the examination paper is used as a defense against the accusation that the portrait is imperfect. After laughing at this text, the reader cannot ask for a more truthful version of Flaubert's life and art without becoming as ridiculous as a self-important teacher.

The final chapter draws the same conclusion the reader is expected to have drawn by this time; namely, that truth is not a term we can use when we pose questions about history and historical persons, or even about our own lives. But this does not bring about a balance of power between the narrator and the reader. Geoffrey exercises his authority and his control over the story at the expense of the reader; by manipulating the reader's expectations. At the moment of beginning the first chapter, Braithwaite is already aware that he can never solve what he ironically refers to as "the Case of the Stuffed Parrot" (216), yet he introduces the reader to his quest for the authentic parrot. In the subsequent chapters the quest itself is not mentioned, but the frequent metaphorization of Flaubert's parrot(s) preserves suspense. The final chapter ("And the Parrot…"), instead of settling the question, reveals that even more parrots have been found, all of which could have very well been Flaubert's model. The reader has to go through the same quest – has to echo, has to parrot the narrator – and thus s/he is caught in the same position as Geoffrey, which makes it difficult to hold him answerable for his failure to provide ultimate explanations.

I now return to the chapter "Pure Story," in which 'pureness,' as Vanessa Guignery notes, could have at least three meanings: that

Braithwaite's story is not corrupted, as opposed to Emma's corrupted one; that it is purely imaginary; or that it is 'true,' as the novel's French translator interpreted it.[23] Yet another layer of this expression can be discovered if one recalls that the first time the parrot is made the symbol of language in the text, the narrator calls Loulou "Pure Word" (10). The fact that Ellen's story is pure, then, may point to it being reconstructed in language, and to its fictional status. By including it in his novel, Braithwaite transforms the "true" story of his wife into fiction, where truth does not necessarily equate to factual truth (as testified by Christopher Ricks' lecture, titled "Mistakes in Literature and Whether They Matter," described in the sixth chapter), and where he can freely misread it for his own purposes. Injecting Ellen's story in the investigation of Flaubert's life and works is also a misprision of the predecessor, since Flaubert's artistic endeavour during the composition of *Madame Bovary* was, as he explains in a letter to Louise Colet, "to write a book about nothing, a book without exterior attachments, which would be held together by the inner force of its style."[24] Braithwaite substitutes his precursor's credo of pure style for "Pure Story," and creates himself as an artist by misreading both Flaubert's and his own life.

Since the authority Geoffrey achieves is not as firm as that of the dethroned Flaubert's, he cements it by constructing the reader as his heir, relying on the logic that if the reader is subjected to him, he himself will gain relative authority. In this hope, Braithwaite invites the readers to a quest for truth, which ends in a multiplication of truths, or maybe in a denial of the existence of any truth. Stunned into uncertainty, the readers inherit an anxiety, which, if they are strong readers, they will be able to use to serve their own interests. One way of dealing with the anxiety of the novel, and to gain distance from Braithwaite, who has an unsettling power over the reader, is to track how Geoffrey's authority is created. And although *The Anxiety of Influence* imagines critics with more independence from the sorrows of the writers than Braithwaite allows them to have, Harold Bloom's theory is an excellent tool for the analysis of Geoffrey's authority – an analysis, which might fulfill Bloom's promise that if we "remember the Siren's own sorrows," the singing will not "castrate us."[25]

23. Guignery, p. 42.

24. Letter to Louise Colet, 16 January 1852. See Gustave Flaubert, *Madame Bovary*, ed. Margaret Cohen, Norton Critical Editions, 2nd ed. (New York; London: W. W. Norton & Company, 2005), p. 300.

25. Bloom, p. 65.

Ascendance

Wojciech Drąg

Thwarted Quests for Meaning

Religion, Art and Love in the Early Novels of Julian Barnes[1]

> … we worried about large things in those days. And why not? When else can you get to worry about them? […] But stuff like the purity of the language, the perfectibility of self, the function of art, plus a clutch of capitalised intangibles like Love, Truth, Authenticity.
>
> Julian Barnes, *Metroland*

Julian Barnes's early novels are all structured around the notion of a quest, or a search, for what Chris, the narrator of his debut novel, calls "capitalised intangibles." Those "intangibles" are, admittedly, difficult to define, which accounts for the rather hazy nature of the pursuits. In my article, I will examine the searches undertaken by the first-person narrators of four of Barnes's novels and argue that the most important objects of those quests are the consolations and reassurances of art, love and religion. I shall first discuss *Metroland*[2] (1980), which could be interpreted as a prelude to Barnes's sustained interest in the notion of a search as well as in questions about the capacity of art, love and religion to offer a stable point of reference and a firm foundation, or, in other words, to generate meaning. Then, in the following sections, I will consider the pursuits of art in *Flaubert's Parrot*[3] (1984), religion in *Staring at the Sun*[4] (1986) and love in *A History of the World in 10½ Chapters*[5] (1989). Stating that Barnes's novels enact a search for

1. Parts of this article are based on my unpublished dissertation entitled "'The Search Is All?': The Pursuit of Meaning in Julian Barnes's *Flaubert's Parrot*, *Staring at the Sun* and *A History of the World in 10½ Chapters*."

2. All parenthesized references are to this edition: Julian Barnes, *Metroland* (London: Robin Clark, 1981).

3. All parenthesized references are to this edition: Julian Barnes, *Flaubert's Parrot* (London: Picador, 2002).

4. All parenthesized references are to this edition: Julian Barnes, *Staring at the Sun* (London: Picador, 1987).

5. All parenthesized references (*A History*) are to this edition: Julian Barnes, *A History of the World in 10½ Chapters* (New York: Vintage International, 1990).

the meaning of life would sound embarrassingly grandiose or, at the very least, banal. However, I will argue, they do engage with, in Chris's words, "large things" (*Metroland* 15). They may do so with a dose of irony and postmodernist playfulness, but they remain seriously committed to tackling existential questions.

Metroland

Barnes's debut may be read today as a novel that introduces most of the major themes with which the writer grapples in his later works. The chapter entitled "The Big D" describes the adolescent narrator's *réveil mortel* (translated by Barnes two and a half decades later as "a wake-up call to mortality"[6]) and thus inaugurates Barnes's enduring engagement with death and transience, which comes to prominence in his more recent books, such as *The Lemon Table* (2004), *Nothing to be Frightened of* (2008), *The Sense of an Ending* (2011) and *Levels of Life* (2013). The last part of the novel raises the questions of fidelity and cuckoldry, which Barnes will explore further in *Before She Met Me* (1982), *Flaubert's Parrot*, *Talking It Over* (1991) and its sequel, *Love, etc* (2000). More importantly, *Metroland* also addresses the issues of art, religion and love, which will be discussed with reference to three of his other early novels.

The structure of *Metroland* is based on a quest or journey which ends in the place where it begins. The eponymous Metroland, the suburban area situated along the Metropolitan Line north west of London, is the setting of the opening and closing parts of the novel, which describe the life of Chris in 1963 and 1977, respectively. The middle part is set in Paris in 1968. The novel follows Chris from his adolescent rebellion against the suburbia and bourgeois values, through his first love affair while on an academic scholarship in Paris, to the comfort of his middle-class life with a wife and daughter back in the once despised but now appreciated Metroland. The circularity of Chris's journey testifies to his acceptance of the model of life that he so passionately opposed as a boy. This radical change in Chris's character is accentuated by the epigraphs which open each part. The first one, a passage from Rimbaud's "Voyelles," points to the young narrator's inclination towards metaphor and his determination to seek hidden meanings. The second epigraph, Verlaine's comment calling into question

6. Julian Barnes, *Nothing to be Frightened of* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2008), p. 23.

the seriousness of Rimbaud's exercise in synaesthesia, encapsulates the beginnings of Chris's skepticism about his youthful idealism. The last section is preceded by a quotation from Bishop Butler, which expresses a very straightforward view on reality, unconcerned with hidden depths. Matthew Pateman reads the epigraphs as an indication of Chris's "becoming less and less interested in searching, in striving for truth, in uncovering symbols" and of his passage "from the desire to search to the desire to accept."[7] The novel concludes with Chris's late-night meditation, in which he quite explicitly distances himself from the need to look for symbolic meanings:

> I follow a half-factitious line about the nature of the light: how the sodium with its strength and nearness blots out the effect of even the fullest moon […] and how this is symbolic of … well, of something, no doubt. But I don't pursue this too seriously: there's no point in trying to thrust false significances on to things. (176)

The objects of Chris's pursuit throughout the novel are art and love. Religion does not feature as a serious proposition; it is rejected definitively very early on. The loss of religious sensibility is expressed in a single paragraph, which links it with the dawning of the fear of death. "God," explains Chris,

> got the boot for a number of reasons, none of which, I suspect, will seem wholly sufficient: the boringness of Sundays, the creeps who took it all seriously at school, Baudelaire and Rimbaud, the pleasure of blasphemy (dangerous, this one), hymn-singing and organ music and the language of prayer, inability any longer to think of wanking as a sin, and – as a clincher – an unwillingness to believe that dead relatives were watching what I was doing. (53)

Frederick Holmes argues that this departure of God is accompanied by the boost of Chris's confidence in art, which becomes effectively "a surrogate religion for him."[8] In "Metroland (1963)" the narrator admits that for him and his friends "[a]rt was the most important thing in life, the constant to which one could be unfailingly devoted and which

7. Matthew Pateman, *Julian Barnes*, Writers and Their Work (Tavistock: Northcote House, 2002), pp. 4–5.

8. Frederick Holmes, *Julian Barnes*, New British Fiction (Basingstoke; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), p. 57.

would never cease to reward" (29). It was also a means of making people "*better* – kinder, wiser, nicer, more peaceful, more active, more sensitive," as well as being the only possible guarantee of immortality (29, 55). In "Paris (1968)" Chris expresses his doubts about art's capacity for transcendence: "Was art merely posh entertainment, on to which a fake spiritual side had been foisted by the non-religious? Life ended; but didn't art end too?" (128). In the final part, Chris visits the National Gallery as he used to in the early sixties but finds it a disheartening experience. He describes his puzzled feelings to his old schoolmate Toni:

> I like it all; I always did; I just don't know whether there's any sort of direct link between it and me – whether the connection we force ourselves to believe in is really there. […] 'I mean, I don't deny that it's all …' I looked up again, nervously '… *fun*, and you know, moving and all that stuff as well, and *interesting* too. But in terms of what it actually *does*, what can you say? (165–6)

Whereas young Chris would subscribe to the statement "[s]ome people say that life is the thing, but I prefer reading" (128), as an adult he admits to privileging life over art. What he used to see as a substitute for religion has become at most a hobby.

Chris's pursuit of love is undoubtedly more successful at reaching its aim. After the failure of his first relationship with Annick, reported in "Paris (1968)," he falls in love with Marion, to whom he is married in the final part. Chris appears to be very happy about their relationship – he even composes a long list of reasons why he loves his wife – although the prospect of marital infidelity is mentioned in one of the closing chapters. One of the qualities which he values most in Marion is her honesty, which Pateman interprets as a foreshadowing of "a quest for a link between love and truth that finds its zenith in 'Parenthesis.'"[9] However, it remains highly debatable whether the qualified success of Chris's pursuit of love could be interpreted as proof of a favourable outcome of his search for meaning. The narrator himself admits in the final part that "[m]arriage moves you further away from the examination of truth, not nearer to it" (141). Chris's decision to settle in Metroland could be seen as testimony to this resignation.

9. Pateman, p. 10.

Art

Flaubert's Parrot, Barnes's third and arguably still most acclaimed novel, enacts a search for the reassurance and consolation of art. Its narrator, Geoffrey Braithwaite, is an elderly doctor and a devoted admirer of Gustave Flaubert. Interestingly, Chris from *Metroland* is also a keen fan of Flaubert and makes frequent allusions to *Madame Bovary*, *Dictionnaire des idées reçues* and *L'Éducation sentimentale*. Throughout the novel Braithwaite collects facts about the life and works of Flaubert, tells stories and anecdotes about him, quotes his novels, letters and diaries and defends him against the accusations of literary critics and historians. However, Braithwaite remains unsatisfied with the essential dryness of his knowledge about Flaubert. At the very beginning of the novel, he complains that "all that remains of him [i.e., Flaubert] is paper. Paper, ideas, phrases, metaphors, structured prose which turns into sound" (2). He desires to know him intimately, to gain a more profound insight into his genius. What comes to serve as an intimate link between Braithwaite and Flaubert is a stuffed parrot, which Braithwaite discovers one day at the Hotel-Dieu in Rouen. The parrot is reputedly the one that Flaubert once borrowed from the museum to serve him as inspiration when he was working on his novella *Un coeur simple*, which features a parrot named Loulou. Braithwaite admits that looking at the stuffed bird he feels "ardently in touch" with Flaubert and imagines it to be the "emblem of the writer's voice" (7, 12). His epiphany compels him to establish whether the exhibit at the Hotel-Dieu is indeed the parrot that Flaubert had in front of him when writing *Un coeur simple* or whether the parrot on display in nearby Croisset is the authentic one.

The novel takes the form of a very loosely structured account of the quest for the genuine parrot, intertwined with numerous digressions about Flaubert. As the plot unfolds, however, it becomes increasingly clear that Braithwaite's story about Flaubert and the parrot is, to a large extent, a mere pretext for telling (or withholding) the tragic story of the protagonist's late wife Ellen. The text is peppered with aposiopeses (moments of sudden breaking off in speech), which occur whenever Braithwaite attempts to overcome his embarrassment and begin his own painful story: "I remember… But I'll keep that for another time" (82); "My wife… Not now, not now" (120). At one point, in the middle of his discussion of *Madame Bovary*, he suddenly confesses:

> Three stories contend within me. One about Flaubert, one about Ellen, one about myself. My own is the simplest of the three [...] and yet I find it the hardest to begin. My wife's is more complicated, and more urgent; yet I resist that too. [...] Ellen's is a true story; perhaps it is even the reason why I am telling you Flaubert's story instead. (94–5)

The reasons why Braithwaite chooses to tell Flaubert's story rather than his own are far from straightforward. On the one hand, he is afraid of confronting the pain of his own tragic story and, therefore, defers it until he can summon the courage to share it with the reader. On the other hand, however, he writes about Flaubert because he hopes to find consolation in telling Flaubert's story. In one of the last chapters of the novel, Braithwaite finally confronts the tragic events of his past. He talks about his long-time marriage with Ellen, which he describes as "happy [...] unhappy [...] happy enough" (197). Embarrassed, he confesses that Ellen used to have numerous affairs with other men, which he pretended not to notice. Eventually, he admits that his wife probably committed suicide and that he was the one to switch off her respirator. The reason for Ellen's decision to take her life was never clear to Braithwaite and that ignorance has haunted him ever since. Years later it remains an unhealed wound and constitutes "the crux of his life."[10]

Lacking any consolatory narrative to explain Ellen's suicide, Braithwaite turns to art. One of the reasons for choosing Flaubert is *Madame Bovary*, whose eponymous character is unfaithful to her husband and ultimately commits suicide. She thus becomes a counterpart to Ellen: the plot of *Madame Bovary* becomes for Braithwaite a context of interpretation, which enables him to identify with Charles Bovary, the betrayed and abandoned widower, and to understand Ellen through the figure of Emma. The parallels that the narrator draws between his story and the life and works of Flaubert, as Georgia Johnston argues, "become sources of meaning for Braithwaite's life, an ideological structure through which he understands himself."[11] The idea that what Braithwaite desperately seeks in art is the ability to understand his personal tragedy is shared by Pateman, who argues that Braithwaite's pursuit of the parrot springs from the same desire: "In trying to understand his loss, Braithwaite needs to understand Flaubert; in order to

10. Georgia Johnston, "Textualizing Ellen: The Patriarchal 'I' of *Flaubert's Parrot*," *Philological Papers* 46 (2000), 64–69, p. 65.

11. Johnston, p. 69.

understand Flaubert, he feels he needs to understand the parrot."[12] If one adopts this hypothesis, then the whole quest on which Braithwaite embarks becomes a means to an end: that of coming to terms with a personal tragedy.

The novel addresses the question of art's therapeutic capacity to help the process of mourning past losses and of gaining insight into personal predicaments. For the most part, Braithwaite seems to be content with the comfort offered by his engagement with Flaubert's literature. By clinging to the belief that art has the capacity to teach, explain and guarantee meaning, Braithwaite endorses the concept of art as a metanarrative. His pursuit of the consolations of art is seen by Neil Brooks as a result of his "modernist approach" to art, manifest in his desire to discover in art "stable hierarchies and master-narratives" that would restore "order and intelligibility to his life."[13] However, the novel repeatedly calls this concept into question. Most notably, the outcome of the quest for the parrot is far from conclusive. In the last chapter, Braithwaite pays another visit to the two museums which claim to own the genuine model for Loulou and closely examines the two exhibits. Afterwards, he arranges to meet Monsieur Andrieu, an elderly expert on Flaubert, and asks to be told the story of the two parrots. He learns that it is possible that neither parrot is authentic, since they were, to a degree, arbitrarily selected from about fifty parrots that were stored in the reserve collection of the Museum of Natural History in Rouen. "[P]leased and disappointed at the same time" (227), Braithwaite decides to visit the Museum and examine what was left of the collection of stuffed parrots. In the last paragraph of the novel, he describes the sight of the three last Amazonian parrots that have survived. After a careful investigation he remarks pensively: "Perhaps it was one of them" (229).

These last words are a testimony to the ultimate inconclusiveness of the novel. The authentic parrot, the only living link between Flaubert and Braithwaite, is not (and probably cannot ever be) identified, suggesting perhaps that art's consolations are, likewise, inaccessible. Erica Hateley argues, however, that despite the failure of Braithwaite's project, he has learnt to cope with Ellen's death and is now ready to "move forward."[14] Nevertheless, most critics read the ending of the

12. Pateman, p. 28.

13. Vanessa Guignery, *The Fiction of Julian Barnes: A Reader's Guide to Essential Criticism*, Reader's Guides to Essential Criticism (Basingstoke; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), p. 45.

14. Guignery, p. 47.

novel as a testimony to the failure of Braithwaite's quest. James Scott argues that the protagonist's immersion in Flaubert's life and literature culminates in "a sense of purposelessness."[15] Guignery, in turn, argues that Braithwaite's "synecdochal journey from the part to the whole" proves "impossible."[16] The narrator himself comes to realise that his attempts to understand life through literature are doomed to failure. In a much-quoted passage, he admits that he understands Flaubert better than his late wife. He goes on to reflect (almost echoing Chris):

> Books say: she did this because. Life says: she did this. Books are where things are explained to you; life is where things aren't. I'm not surprised some people prefer books. Books make sense of life. The only problem is that the lives they make sense of are other people's lives, never your own. (201)

In the long run, implies Braithwaite, literature – or, more generally, art – is incapable of imposing meaning on life or helping anyone to understand it.

Religion

Barnes's next novel, *Staring at the Sun*, examines the search for religious belief in an age when belief seems no longer possible and religion is seen as a consolatory fable invented to mitigate the definitiveness of death. In this "confidently postmetaphysical"[17] world, Gregory, an insurance salesman and a confirmed bachelor, begins, at the age of sixty, to reflect on questions about life and death. He suddenly finds himself seized by a sense of the purposelessness of his life and realises that he has paid too little attention to life's "big issues." Although in the past years Gregory was not particularly interested in any religion, now the questions of God's existence and the afterlife assume overriding importance. He discovers that religion answers his need for a pattern, a coherent narrative that would account for his existence, and an illusion of order and harmony: "The old story, the first story: Gregory

15. James Scott, "Parrots as Paradigms: Infinite Deferral of Meaning in *Flaubert's Parrot*," *ARIEL* 21.3 (1990), 57–68, p. 59.

16. Guignery, p. 41.

17. Terry Eagleton's phrase, qtd. in Linda Hutcheon, *Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction* (London, Routledge, 1988), p. 19.

eased himself into it. A comfortable jacket, an armchair fitted to your shape by long use, the wooden handle of an old saw, a jazz tune with all its parts, a footprint in the sand which fits your shoe" (165). Gregory appears to accept religion because of the consolation it offers rather than the answers it provides. It is suggested that his need for belief also springs from a growing fear of death. The novel owes its title to the following maxim by La Rochefoucauld: "Neither the sun nor death can be stared at steadily."[18] To stare at death directly and without blinking is what Gregory finds himself incapable of doing. He needs religion because he cannot confront mortality. "God," as Merritt Moseley points out in his discussion of the novel, "is a defence men turn to because they are afraid."[19]

Gregory epitomises not only the intangible longing for religious reassurance but also the dramatic intellectual pursuit of the answers to questions about the existence of God, the validity of religion and the finality of death. He approaches religion intellectually and is dissatisfied with the crude choice between subscribing to the belief in either the existence or non-existence of God. Therefore, he creates his own set of fifteen possible permutations about God. The long list, composed of both serious and facetious entries, includes the hypotheses that God once existed but does not any longer; that God "exists only as long as belief in him exists"; that he has abandoned his creation or is simply "taking a divine sabbatical" (162–6). In his questioning of the simple dualism between belief and non-belief and of the drawing of absolute distinctions, Gregory adopts a postmodern theological stance. Exasperated by the inconclusiveness of his intellectual pursuit, Gregory turns to The Absolute Truth computer, ironically referred to as TAT, and asks it questions about the current state of world religions and the number of their followers. In place of satisfactory answers, he receives dry statistics. He eventually asks: "Do you believe in God?" to which the computer replies, "NOT REAL QUESTION" (175–6). The session with TAT increases Gregory's frustration.

Gregory comes to realise that the underlying question he pursues is about eternal life. "Eternal life – that was always the great bargaining counter, wasn't it?" suggests the narrating voice later in the novel (188). When Gregory goes on to consider whether it is braver to believe or not to believe in God, these are his reflections about the implications of rejecting belief:

18. Qtd. in Guignery, p. 59.

19. Merritt Moseley, *Understanding Julian Barnes* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1997), p. 98.

> you are declaring the certainty of your own non-existence. I end. I do not go on. [...] You are complacent in the face of extinction [...] You stretch out on your deathbed confident that you have understood the question of life; you boldly declare for the void. Imagine that moment. Imagine the fear. (166)

Although he is far from complacent in the face of his death, Gregory ultimately renounces his religious explorations. He realises that he has not been seeking the answer to the question about whether God exists but rather the certainty that he does. When faced with pessimistic findings, he refuses to continue his search and stops at a point that gives him neither reassurance nor consolation.

Whereas Gregory is portrayed as fearful and weak, his mother, Jean Serjeant, emerges as an embodiment of courage. Boldness marks most of the crucial decisions of her life, including the dramatic move to leave her husband and begin a new life away from home, with Gregory to provide for. Jean did not use to study much in her life but was always very curious about the world. From the earliest years she would ask herself serious questions about life. When she retires, her curiosity pushes her to travel. During one of her trips she visits the Grand Canyon, which she expects to shake her religious indifference and amaze her with its majesty. Jean's reaction, however, is the opposite: "the Canyon stunned her into uncertainty" (98). The mystical experience of seeing this natural wonder helps her realise that she is devoid of any religious sense. Towards the end of the novel, when asked by Gregory about God, she cryptically remarks: "God's on a motor-bike off the west coast of Ireland" (183). To Jean, God is an abstraction and religion is a belief system invented by people to deceive themselves that death is not final. The playful image of God riding a motor-bike suggests the futility of pursuing religion. God, if he exists, is beyond human reach.

In the last part of the novel, Jean – old, disillusioned but serene – witnesses Gregory's struggle with eschatological questions and tries to allay his fears. In an attempt to save him the pain and disappointment of the (in her view) inevitable failure of his search for religious reassurance, she tells him that religion is "nonsense" and that death is "absolute" (185). She calls his pursuit "screaming at the sky" (157) and perceives his search as a desperate and, in a sense, heroic attempt to divine a meaning beyond himself, which, although doomed to ultimate

failure, is a necessary stage in a journey to a deeper understanding of the human condition:

> Putting your head back and roaring at the empty heavens, knowing that however much noise you made, nobody up there would hear you. And then you flopped down on your back, exhausted, self-conscious and a little pleased: even if no one was listening, you had somehow made your point. That was what Gregory was doing. He was making his point. (157)

In Jean's view, the purposefulness of the search is not undermined by its ultimate frustration. Seeking God and failing to find him is shown in the novel as inscribed in the experience of a searching human individual. Even though, as Jean describes it, the outcome of the pursuit entails a painful disappointment and "exhaustion," it also makes one "a little pleased" that one has made their point (157). The search may not reach its hopeful end but attains a different one: it frees one from illusions and allows one to stare directly at the sun.

The failure of the religious pursuit dramatised in *Staring at the Sun* brings the reader back to the title of the novel and hints at its significance. To stare at the sun is to have the courage to discard consolatory narratives. A belief in God emerges as a master narrative that provides people with an illusion of a pattern and order. And if, according to the theoreticians of postmodernism, all totalising accounts of ultimate reality may be doomed to failure, so is religion. Seeking the reassurance of religious belief is presented in the novel as an attempt to hide the dazzling truth about the finality of death. "God," Moseley concludes, "is the hand we put before our eyes because we cannot stare directly at the sun."[20]

Love

A History of the World in 10½ Chapters, Barnes's next novel, takes the form of a loosely connected text made up of eleven sections, where the constituent parts challenge the certainties of received, canonised history. Echoes of a search for love as a potential guarantee of meaning could be traced to several chapters but I shall concentrate on the titular half-chapter. "Parenthesis" comes after chapter eight, which

20. Moseley, p. 98.

positions it in the midst of other texts, neither at the beginning of the novel nor at the end. On the other hand, however, its title singles it out, suggesting that it is not an integral part of the rest of the text but, in a sense, stands on the side. What further emphasises the uniqueness of "Parenthesis" is the voice of the narrator, which is suggested to be the voice of the implied author. At the very beginning of the section, the narrator describes El Greco's *Burial of the Count of Orgaz*, in which the painter is believed to look directly at the viewer. The narrator then goes on to hint that he himself assumes now the position of El Greco in his picture. Guignery argues that at this moment Barnes chooses to discard "the mask of pseudonyms or narrators" and "assumes responsibility for his reflections about love and history."[21] Moseley, likewise, argues that in the half-chapter "Barnes comes as close as possible, for a novelist, to *speaking as himself*," but concedes that this identification may be interpreted as a mere literary device – that "the 'Julian Barnes' speaking here is a mask behind which the 'real' Julian Barnes is smirking at the sentimentality of these ideas."[22]

One of the motifs that run through the entire novel is the notion of survival. The first chapter tells the story of Noah's ark; chapter two describes a historian who survives a terrorist attack; "Shipwreck" depicts the tragic story of the castaways from the raft of the Medusa and, finally, one of the later chapters is straightforwardly entitled "The Survivor." Survival is frequently examined in relation to love. In the opening part of "Parenthesis," the narrator quotes the last line of Philip Larkin's "An Arundel Tomb": "What will survive of us is love" (226). He then asks if this famous line is true or if it should only be read as a pretty "poetic flourish." He wonders if love "glows after our deaths" for a while like outdated television sets after being switched off. This image of love, however appealing, is ultimately discarded. The death of lovers puts an end to their love, too – love cannot survive outside of them. "If anything survives of us it will probably be something else," remarks the narrator. In the case of Larkin, it will be his poetry, not his love (227).

The link between love and survival, although called into question at the very beginning, keeps recurring further in the text. During his polyglot analysis of the words "I love you" the narrator asks, "Are there tribes whose lexicon lacks the words *I love you*? Or have they all died out?" He then declares that love should be spoken about with restraint,

21. Guignery, p. 64.
22. Moseley, pp. 121–3.

honesty and precision. "If it is to save us," he points out, "we must look at it as clearly as we should look at death." The question arises about what kind of salvation the narrator has in mind. He soon clarifies that he does not mean "happiness": "Let's start at the beginning. Love makes you happy? No. […] Love makes everything all right? Indeed no. I used to believe all this, of course" (229). The narrator then refers to his own failed relationship and confesses: "Mutual love did not add up to happiness. Stubbornly, we insisted that it did." He then disputes the idea that love is capable of "making" anybody happy: love is no "transforming wand" (230).

"We must love one another or die," wrote W. H. Auden in "September 1, 1939" and later changed it to "We must love one another *and* die," notes the narrator of "Parenthesis" and praises Auden's correction: "If a line sounds ringingly good but isn't true, out with it" (230–1, emphasis added). The change of "or" to "and" is crucial, as it implies that love cannot guarantee any kind of immortality. Further on, however, the narrator pauses to reflect on the first version of the quote and suggests an alternative way of reading it: "We must love one another because if we don't, if love doesn't fuel our lives, then we might as well be dead." This appears to be the kind of survival that love may be capable of securing, by injecting scraps of meaning into an otherwise meaningless existence. It may not be a lasting survival, but it is the only available one. Love cannot work miracles but it can give one "spine-stretching confidence" and "clarity of vision" (232). A moment later, however, the narrator undermines the idea that love could guarantee survival: "Our love doesn't help us survive […] Yet it gives us our individuality, our purpose" (234). It is to those qualities that love owes its ultimate superiority over religion and art:

> Religion has become either wimpishly workaday, or terminally crazy, or merely businesslike […] Art, picking up confidence from the decline of religion, announces its transcendence of the world (and it lasts, it lasts! art beats death!), but this announcement isn't accessible to all, or where accessible isn't always inspiring or welcome. So religion and art must yield to love. It gives us our humanity, and also our mysticism. There is more to us than us. (242–3)

An examination of love's capacity to grant meaning in *A History* could not be complete without considering its relationship with

history itself. Love is put forward by the narrator as the only way to resist history and defy its dictatorship. Without love, history becomes "ridiculous" and "brutally self-important" (238). Love perhaps "won't change the history of the world," points out the narrator, "but it will do something much more important: teach us to stand up to history, to ignore its chin-out strut. I don't accept your terms, love says; sorry, you don't impress" (238). The confidence gained through love could enable one to look at history without awe and see its absurdity.

Another reason why love should have the capacity to resist the terror of history is its connection with truth. Whereas history is dismissed in "Parenthesis" as fabulation, love is the closest one can get to truth. "Love and truth," states the narrator, "yes, that's the prime connection" (243). This declaration sounds surprising in a novel that has been consistently undermining the notion of objective truth, with several consecutive chapters ("The Stowaway" in particular) illustrating the mechanisms of transforming stories into the "truths" of history. The narrator, however, is not naïve about truth:

> We all know objective truth is not obtainable, that when some event occurs we shall have a multiplicity of subjective truths which we assess and then fabulate into history, into some God-eyed version of what 'really' happened. This God-eyed version is a fake – a charming, impossible fake." (243)

Still, if one wants love to defy history, one has to put aside our scepticism about truth.

The belief in love as truth, however firm, does not guarantee love's ultimate victory. The narrator repeats that love is by definition prone to failure: "It will go wrong, this love; it probably will. […] But when love fails us, we must still go on believing in it. Is it encoded in every molecule that things fuck up, that love will fail? Perhaps it is. Still we must believe in love, just as we must believe in free will and objective truth" (244).[23] The narrator declares that to act against the grain of the world, in which love will almost certainly fail, is the only chance to survive. If one's efforts fail, the history of the world is to blame. "But that's still to come. Perhaps it will never come. In the night the world can be defied" (244). After all, the narrator wonders, love's defeat may not be inevitable. He is lying next to his love and feels like waking her

23. The inevitability of love's failure is exemplified in two other chapters of the novel, "The Visitors" and "Upstream!"

up to tell her this "grand truth," but eventually decides against it: "in the morning it may not seem worth disturbing her for" (244). On that playful and inconclusive note, "Parenthesis" ends and leaves open the question about love's capacity to stand up to history.

Conclusion

As has been argued, the pursuit of religious belief enacted in *Staring at the Sun* and, to a lesser extent, in *Metroland* definitively fails to reach its desired end. Neither Gregory nor his mother Jean is able to find consolation in religion. Although thwarted, the search is not altogether futile: it enables Jean to see through illusory reassurance and summon the courage to "stare at the sun." In *Flaubert's Parrot* the notion of pursuit itself and its purposefulness are presented as problematic. On the one hand, the object of the quest, the authentic parrot, is not found. But the overriding aim of Braithwaite's search is not so much to identify the authentic exhibit as to come to terms with his wife's suicide. Whether the protagonist achieves that goal is debatable. What makes the search worthwhile is not its closure (which is denied) but the very fact that, as Scott points out, it keeps the protagonist in motion.[24] Where stable meaning is not accessible, movement may guarantee survival; hence Ellen's refusal to search for meaning leads to her suicide. According to Scott, since there are no answers to Braithwaite's questions, the fact that he asks them allows him to survive.

In comparison to religion and art, love emerges as a more accessible source of transcendence. The narrator of "Parenthesis," hinting that he speaks as "Julian Barnes," declares that, where religion fails because of its mundane practicality and art because of its essentially elitist character, love transcends the everyday, offers us mysticism and announces that "there is more to us than us." The search for love, however, is also prone (if not doomed) to failure. "But when love fails us, we must still go on believing in it," he adds. The search becomes an act of defiance, a refusal to submit to the entropy of the world of "beguiling relativity" (*A History 244*), in which there are no unimpeachable foundations. The narrator insists that one has to believe heroically in love even if the ultimate failure of any human endeavour is "encoded in every molecule." That enduring confidence in love appears to be shared and prefigured by Chris, who, in the last part of *Metroland*,

24. Scott, p. 70.

refuses to yield to cynicism about love, even though he has renounced his once unshakeable belief in art.

These implications, however, are merely some of a variety of ways to conclude the discussion of the novels' exploration of the notion of the pursuit of meaning. The desire to draw a final conclusion runs counter to the poetics of Barnes's novels, which appear to follow the guideline given by Braithwaite: "Discuss without concluding" (*Flaubert's Parrot* 189). Perhaps the main reason Barnes's texts refuse to yield straightforward conclusions is their postmodernist playfulness. Although they address such "capitalised intangibles" as Art, Religion and Love, they tackle them with a degree of ironic detachment, of which the quintessential example is Barnes's idea of making a book-length discussion about art's capacity to connect with life hinge on the success or failure of a quest for a stuffed parrot that Flaubert named Loulou.

Eszter Tory

The Courage to Believe

Mediocrity and Faith in Julian Barnes's *Staring at the Sun*

"Is it brave to believe in God?" is one of many questions discussed by Julian Barnes in his fourth novel, *Staring at the Sun*[1] (1986). Although Barnes is notorious for using, even abusing, biblical references and religious motifs in his fiction as well as for explicitly addressing issues of faith in works of non-fiction such as *Nothing to be Frightened of* (2008), the spiritual undercurrent of his writings is a dimension less examined by literary scholars. *Staring at the Sun* presents lyrical meditations on love, war, courage, the fear of death, and God in a strikingly simple language. At the time of publication, reviewers were quite disconcerted by this novel, as it conspicuously differed in theme, form and style from the preceding experimental novel *Flaubert's Parrot* (1984). Some called the book a "crippling disappointment"[2] due to its poor narrative action and lack of a unifying theme. Moreover, Lawson criticized the voice of the author which permeates all his characters so that they are not granted a specific voice of their own. Like Lawson, David Lodge also deemed Gregory's character colourless and "a mere mouthpiece for philosophical speculations"[3] which seem to be remnants of Barnes's preceding novel. In contrast to these strong voices of criticism, Vanessa Guignery claims that the book offers "a series of ordinary miracles and invites to probe beneath the apparent simplicity of the prose."[4] In agreement with Guignery, I wish to shed some light on the spiritual undercurrent of this novel, as the slow disenchantment of the protagonist triggers an inverse process in the narrative itself. Moreover, the deceptive simplicity of the characters and the mediocrity of the two protagonists in particular will be explored, emphasizing the role of these two features in the characters' poor relation to the spiritual domain.

1. All parenthesized references are to this edition: Julian Barnes, *Staring at the Sun* (London: Picador, 1987).

2. Mark Lawson, "The Genre-Bender Gets it Wrong," *Sunday Times* 8460 (28 September 1986), p. 53.

3. Qtd. in Meritt Moseley, *Understanding Julian Barnes* (Columbia, SC: University of Carolina Press, 1997), p. 92.

4. Vanessa Guignery, *The Fiction of Julian Barnes: A Reader's Guide to Essential Criticism*, Readers' Guides to Essential Criticism (Basingstoke; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), p. 52.

Earlier interpretations of the novel, which claimed that Barnes constructed this work on the protagonist's, Jean Serjeant's, denial of the transcendental, can be challenged if the two protagonists' attitudes to both existential and religious questions are subjected to scrutiny. According to Wojciech Drąg, the pursuit of religious belief dramatised in *Staring at the Sun* fails to reach its desired goal, as Gregory fails to find consolation in religion. Still, the search does not appear to be futile as it enables Jean Serjeant to see through the illusory reassurances offered by religion and to gain the courage to stare death in the face. Drąg concludes his comparative analysis of *Flaubert's Parrot*, *Staring at the Sun* and *A History of the World in 10½ Chapters* (1989) by stating that "in comparison to religion and art, love [...] emerges [...] as the most solid foundation for a meaningful existence. It is said in the text to be the only accessible source of transcendence and the quintessence of our humanity."[5] Thus, Jean's final act of staring at the sun is read as Barnes's decision to abandon religion in his search for meaning. This reading of the novel is valid insofar as the subsequent books are considered, as those books, *A History of the World in 10½ Chapters* and *Talking it Over* (1991), primarily focus on the unreliability of history and the multifaceted nature of love. Nevertheless, interpreting *Staring at the Sun* as Barnes's abandonment of religious inquiries denies the novel's inherent mystical domain, which is as significant as Jean's disenchantment. As the novel proceeds, the narrative becomes more indirect and thus the genre of the book less distinct, both of which seem to counterbalance Jean's growing rationalism and strengthen the sense of uncertainty regarding Jean's perspective of the world as a spiritually barren place. The second part of the essay argues that the pivotal characters, Jean and Gregory, stagnate on the level of mediocrity because they are unable to summon the courage to believe in an enchanted world where faith is possible or in past notions like God, religion and afterlife, and rise to a spiritual mode of existence.

The Four Wills

In the light of an interdisciplinary approach, the unique character construction of not only the main characters but also the minor characters comes into focus. The characters of *Staring at the Sun* can be analysed as

5. Wojciech Drąg, "'The Search Is All?': The Pursuit of Meaning in Julian Barnes's *Flaubert's Parrot*, *Staring at the Sun* and *A History of the World in 10½ Chapters*," MA thesis (University of Glamorgan, 2007), pp. 61–2, accessed 23 February 2013 <http://www.julianbarnes.com/docs/drag.pdf>.

literary manifestations of what modern psychology calls major drives in the human psyche. Scholars of contemporary psychology still generally agree that the primary motivational forces of humans can be placed in the following categories: the will to live, the will to pleasure, the will to superiority and the will to meaning. The characters can be sorted into certain groups according to their most prominent attributes that significantly determine their personalities and their roles in the novel. However, the two leading characters, Jean and Gregory, prove to be more complex and, therefore, their characters will be regularly revisited.

The first category is "the will to live," which originates from Schopenhauer, who first used the term in *The World as Will and Representation* (1818). In this work he claims that everything that happens in the world is the expression and the manifestation of the will to live and depends solely on the desires of the individuals. In contrast to Hegel, who advocated the concept of Zeitgeist, Schopenhauer believed that people were motivated by their own personal desires, will to live, which is a mindless, futile, non-rational urge at the foundation of our instinctual drives. In *Staring at the Sun*, Gregory's obsession with death leads towards despair and self-centeredness; he even fails to find tender joys in the everyday: "Enjoy himself? Yes, he wanted to enjoy himself. Or rather, he wanted to want to enjoy himself" (107). His character lacks any kind of deep interest in people and, therefore, the fact that he is more preoccupied with death than living life to its fullest provokes the question of why hold on to life so vehemently if one has failed to find anything valuable besides living itself. From this it follows that Gregory's will to live is the most fundamental force of his existence.

The second category derives from Sigmund Freud's essay entitled "Two Principles of Mental Functioning" (1911). In this essay he introduces "the pleasure principle," mostly referred to as "the will to pleasure": "It is described as the pleasure-unpleasure [*Lust-Unlust*] principle, or more shortly the pleasure principle. These processes strive towards gaining pleasure; psychical activity draws back from any event which might arouse unpleasure."[6] Freud stresses that, as opposed to the pleasure principle, the reality principle is the ability of the mind to assess the happenings of the external world and to act accordingly. However, it is primarily the pleasure principle which draws up the programme of life's purpose, even if it goes against rationality as dictated by external reality. In *Staring at the Sun*, Uncle Leslie's figure exemplifies the will to pleasure with his regular drinking, his

6. Qtd. in Simon Boag, *The Freudian Repression, the Unconscious, and the Dynamics of Inhibition* (London: Karnac Books, 2012), p. 29.

devotion to golf, but most prominently with his escape to America at the start of the war, a move attributed by his family to his cowardice. On the basis of Freud's work, bravery and acting on moral grounds go against gaining pleasure and, instead, involve selfless acts of sacrifice and compassion; therefore, both courage and acting on moral ideals belong under the unpleasure principle, as they fail to prioritize the self over others. Leslie's cowardly behaviour, his commitment to pursuing worldly pleasures and his eventual flight from the country give proof of the dominant role the will to pleasure plays in his character.

Even though "the will to power**"** is only the third category on the present list, it is one of the most widely-known drives. The will to power is a central concept in the philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche, according to whom where there is some sort of life, there is will to power, due to which even the strongest living beings will risk their lives for more power: "And as the lesser surrenders itself to the greater, to have pleasure and power over the least: so too the greatest surrenders itself and for the sake of power stakes – life thereon."[7] In the battle for power, the stronger becomes the master of the weaker, insofar as the latter becomes unable to assert its independence. While exploring the desire for power, Nietzsche connects man's desire for cruelty with the pleasure of feeling power. The lines "[w]ar, of course, was men's business. Men conducted it, and men – tapping out their pipes like headmasters – explained it" (17) ascribe exclusively male characters to modern warfare. Moreover, this citation conveys the idea of men being the privileged figures of authority and the providers of certainty regarding worldly matters. Along the same lines, Jean's father is described as an authoritative figure, who reads and explains the war proceedings and political crises to his wife and daughter. Michael's, Jean's husband's, inability to understand Jean, his failure to restrain his temper and, eventually, his regular verbal and occasional physical abuse of his wife lead to Jean's disappointment in men in general and to her dismissal of the potentiality of the male domain: "Men should be pitied, Jean thought; pitied, and left. Women were brought up to believe that men were the answer. They weren't. They weren't even one of the questions" (78). Furthermore, Sergeant Prosser is apparently also driven by the will to power, as his speech primarily evokes the inhumane ruthlessness of war, while his person represents the perpetrator: "What I *miss* […] is killing Germans. I used to enjoy that.

7. Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, The Electronic Classics, trans. Thomas Common, p. 87, accessed 4 May 2013 <http://www2.hn.psu.edu/faculty/jmanis/nietsche/tszarath.pdf>.

Chasing them down until they were too low to bale out and then letting them have it. That gave me a lot of satisfaction" (26). His lack of moral responsibility manifests itself in how he is left unshaken by witnessing the deaths of his comrades. Nevertheless, his emotional numbness yet spontaneous outburst of feelings, "'I'm sure I'll fly again,' he replied, as if giving the second half of a joke" (23), and eventual suicide are all symptoms of suffering from PTSD, demonstrating that he is not only a perpetrator but another victim of the war.

Finally, the concept of "the will to meaning" is based on Kierkegaard's identical term, which was utilized by Viktor Frankl in the field of psychology. After Freud's psychoanalysis and Adler's individual psychology, Frankl's logotherapy was regarded as the Third Viennese School of Psychotherapy. In contrast to Adler's Nietzschean doctrine of the will to power, logotherapy is founded upon the belief that the striving to find meaning in one's life is the primary and the most powerful driving force in man. In addition, this school attempts to make the patients fully aware of their "responsibility" by helping them to realize "for what, to what, or to whom he understands himself [or herself] to be responsible."[8] Along with critics like Guignery and Moseley, I believe that the most dominant drive of the main characters in Barnes's fictional work is to gain meaning. The will to meaning manifests itself in the desire of both protagonists to find answers to certain questions. As a young girl, Jean is preoccupied with the idea of revealing the mysteries of the world and, at the same time, she enjoys her state of enchantment: "When she grew up, someone would explain the code to her; though in the meantime she felt quite happy not knowing" (7). *Staring at the Sun* narrates Jean's slow disenchantment, how her need for and belief in questions and their answers, as expressed in the passage "as she grew up, she would find out the other answers. Answers to all sorts of questions" (14), are transformed into her insistence on the mere certainty of things: "Her ambitions were no longer specifically for happiness [...] but for something more general: the continuing certainty of things. She needed to know that she would carry on being herself" (125). However, her inquisitive and critical mind persists throughout her life of a hundred years. As a child she dwells on contradictions: "It seemed to her that you were in a position to ask a really correct question only if you already knew the answer, and what was the point in that?"(17). Yet, by her elderly years she is persistent in believing that all things have a course of their own which

8. Viktor Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning: An Introduction to Logotherapy*, trans. Ilse Lasch (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992), p. 114.

they should follow: "when she heard a story or watched a film, she cared much less whether the ending was happy or unhappy; she just wanted it to turn out properly, correctly, in accordance with its own logic" (125). Even though Jean deals with questions of less existential nature than does her son, it is she who embraces the indeterminability of things and accepts that the most important inquiries will never lead anywhere and that her quest for answers will never reach its end: "The serious questions always remained unanswered" (151).

Unlike his mother, Gregory is depicted as an indifferent child who grows up to be even more uncurious of the world. His inability to find happiness is analogous to Jean's problem with asking the right questions. As he is not capable of enjoying himself, he wonders how others find joy in the world: "How could they know in advance where pleasure lay?"(107). It is only in his sixties, when Gregory awakens to the inevitability of death, that this realization triggers two drives: first the will to live, as discussed earlier, and later the drive to make sense of his life, the will to meaning. His anxiety springs from his failure to find meaning and is mirrored by his growing obsession with death. He turns toward religious belief in the hope of finding something that would provide safe passage to an afterlife without experiencing the inevitable pain of death. The list of 15 alternative answers to "the God question" (162) and his inquires on the same matter from TAT, The Absolute Truth computer, reflect that his character wishes to approach spirituality and faith as such in an entirely intellectual manner. Suffice it to say, understanding, not to mention gaining, spiritual belief based on pure reason is paradoxical and, therefore, faith remains unattainable for him.

Mediocrity

Although Barnes scrutinises the psyche of the two protagonists, all the characters, along with Jean and Greg, are depicted as having limited insight into their own identities. Jean, for instance, rejects the idea that her inclination to travel to "somewhere, anywhere else" (85) is a substitute for some other desire, and she does not understand, or even contemplate, why she should explore the underlying reasons for her decision to see the world. The fact that even Gregory notices Jean's unwillingness to consider her reasons for travelling is quite conspicuous "[i]f you asked her why, she'd smile and say something about ticking off the Seven Wonders. But that wasn't *why*. And yet *why* didn't

seem to bother her" (110). From among the disappointed reviewers of *Staring at the Sun*, it was perhaps Hamilton who criticized Jean's character and commented on her apparently limited intelligence the most harshly: Jean "is portrayed as near-retarded, according to any conventional definition of brain power."[9] In the light of her uneventful adult life, visiting the Seven Wonders of the World gives her hope of experiencing, being affected by, these miraculous places, seeing an "ordinary miracle" (2) just like Prosser's seeing the sun rise twice. Besides her reluctance to think about her motivation to travel, another instance of her incomprehensible disinterest is when, in her recollection of her childhood, she recalls how glad she felt at the outbreak of the war: "the war began […] Things had all been taken out of her hands; she no longer needed to feel guilty" (16). Jean does not elaborate, or feel the need to elaborate retrospectively, why this sense of guilt arose in her as a child. When the focalization shifts to Gregory, we move from one extreme to the other, since his character thrives on theorizing. The list of 15 alternatives regarding God and afterlife gives evidence of his obsession with death. Nevertheless, his interest remains in the private domain, as he is solely concerned with his own, individual well-being and cares little for others: "he would shift his gaze to the traffic below, to the wailing flow of people quickly going to other places. He stared at them without envy" (85).

Even though *Staring at the Sun* stands out from the rest of Barnes's early works due to thematic, structural and stylistic differences, the protagonists of the novel demonstrate one of the most prominent features of Barnes's character construction: his main characters, just like Jean and Gregory, are the embodiments of mediocre anti-heroism. Postmodern literature often exploits anti-heroic characters, who evolved from what Northrop Frye calls the hero of the low mimetic mode:

> 4. If superior neither to other men nor to his environment, the hero is one of us: we respond to a sense of his common humanity, and demand from the poet the same canons of probability that we find in our own experience. This gives us the hero of the *low mimetic* mode, of most comedy and of realistic fiction.[10]

9. Qtd. in Frederick M. Holmes, *Julian Barnes*, New British Fiction (Basingstoke; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), p. 147.

10. Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1971), p. 34.

While in realistic novels the characters' relation to the external world is emphasised, modernist fiction focuses on the characters' consciousness, a feature maintained in postmodern fiction. The focus of postmodernist narrative, however, shifts to ontological matters in terms of the author, the narrator and the characters themselves. Barnes utilizes all three modes of narrative conventions in his fiction, as both the external and internal worlds of the characters are depicted. In addition, self-reflexive inquiries can be found from both the narrator and the characters. Still, the unheroic nature and inadequacy of anti-heroes/heroines are further emphasised by Barnes's employment of mediocrity in designing his characters. Using mediocre protagonists as focalizers of the novels is a key element of Barnes's idiosyncratic style.

Jean's mediocrity, along with her son's, permeates the plot of *Staring at the Sun*. Their ordinariness is stressed in three modes: in the eyes of others, through their passive nature and in their peculiar perspective of the world. First, Jean's parents were keen to regularly remind Jean of her average looks: "'You're not pretty, but you'll do'" (19); her husband, Michael, having failed at consummating their marriage, uses the exact words of her parents to hide his disappointment with her: "We aren't talking about it […] That's enough now. You'll do" (60). Gregory's mediocre character is regularly reflected on by his mother continuing the habit of Jean's parents: "No one could object to him; but no one had any particular reason for liking him" (84). His personality is usually described in free indirect speech: "He had girlfriends, but […] never felt quite what he was expected to feel" (108), as only his mother shows true concern for him. Owing to the abundant display of free indirect speech, *Staring at the Sun* was criticized by scholars for having characters that serve as mere mouthpieces for ideas discussed in previous novels of Barnes. Yet the use of this rhetorical tool can serve other purposes, which will be further elaborated in the following subchapter. Jean's wishes for her son not only predetermined his character, but also reflect her own fears that shape his personality:

> she had all the normal wishes for her son […] But she had also seen enough to doubt all this […] And so Jean also wished for her son the negative things, the avoidances. May you avoid misery, poverty, disease. May you be unremarkable. May you do the best you can but not chase impossibilities. May you be safe within yourself. May you not get burnt, even once. (107)

Accordingly, Gregory grows up to be a man of unremarkable talent, cold rationalism and indifference. His personality stems from his mother's fears, most of which are based on experience other than her own; therefore, these fears can be seen as irrational. Even though Jean is depicted as a once open-minded young girl who was entertained by things she could not understand, her character never attempts to reach the impossible or to become remarkable. The last sentence of the quotation above is a clear reference to Prosser's answer to her question with regard to Michael being a good future husband for her: "You've got to get burned once. Just try not to get burned twice" (38). Her wish for her son never to experience this poorly defined phenomenon comes true. Getting burned implies experiencing something devastating in Prosser's and disappointing in Jean's case (the war and having married Michael, respectively), which dramatically changes the individuals' personality. Perhaps Gregory's realization of the endless indecidability signalled by "[e]nough thoughts" (189) can be read as the third example of getting burnt. Hence, the passage following the quoted line will be returned to, as it is a key element in terms of Gregory's character development underlining a change in his attitude towards the spiritual domain.

Secondly, the passivity of the two protagonists also undermines their figures, especially when it is Jean herself who reflects retrospectively on their lack of achievements: "She had done little in her time, Gregory had done less" (182). Even though Jean managed to leave her husband, which was certainly courageous of her to do, the reason she gives for staying with him for all those years – "I stay because everything says I should go, because it doesn't make any sense, because it's absurd" (117) – shows that her staying was not based on rational arguments and, therefore, her flight cannot be read as an act of reason, nor as an act of courage. As already mentioned, Gregory is more of an observer than a participant of the world around him: "Other people's lives, deaths and pleasures: they seemed increasingly mysterious to Gregory. He peered out at them through his horn-rimmed spectacles and wondered why they did the things they did" (110). Perhaps he is the least round or articulated character of the Barnesian oeuvre, which justly led the reviewers to doubt Gregory's character and to assume that he served as a mask to conceal the author, who could then present his own thoughts on God and religion.

Third, the peculiar world view represented by the characters is rather symbolic of their inability to change their fates. Both characters

fail to shape their lives according to their needs, as they never realize what it is they actually desire; however, it is only Jean who realizes that her life was not chosen but that it simply happened to her: "Most people didn't do anything [...] you are allowed to think that adult life consists of a constant exercise of personal will [...] Most of life is passive, the present a pinprick between an invented past and an imagined future" (182). Leading a meaningful life is a central issue for Jean in *Staring at the Sun* and the fear and the realization of life passing you by is actually a recurring motif in the entire Barnesian oeuvre. However, it is only Jean who openly admits having witnessed her life instead of having lived according to what she had once imagined. Her expectations are not met by what the world has to offer, and the text implies that her person lacks a certain characteristic vital for a prosperous life.

The Courage to Believe

As Guignery correctly points out, "Barnes named courage as the main theme of *Staring at the Sun*, and indeed courage and the lack of it, or fear, figure prominently in the novel and take up several forms."[11] I consider courage an even more prominent theme than fear, as the novel deals more with the various forms courage may take in the private and the public domain. Jean stresses the complex nature of the notion in her recollection with regard to the characters. According to Prosser, "You can't talk about it. [...] it isn't the sensible thing" (47), while Uncle Leslie believes it is the opposite of "running away" and "being windy" (49). The female perspective is complemented by Rachel on this matter, who shows admiration of Jean having left her husband; it is said at this point that perhaps courage is "a matter of doing the obvious when other people saw it as unobvious" (127), whereas with regard to Rachel's character it is defined as "to carry on believing all your life what you believed at the start of it" (181). Having visited Uncle Leslie at his deathbed, Jean once again revisits the concept of courage and concludes that "[p]erhaps courage in the face of death was only part of it; perhaps faking courage for those who loved you was the greater, higher courage" (192). Jean is so keen to define this term as if courage were the single element by which one's life could be judged as worthy. Interestingly, believing in God or any divine reality is regarded to be simply nonsensical by Jean, even though it could be regarded as a form of being courageous, as it shares some features of courage listed

11. Guignery, p. 55.

above. Believing in a divine being or reality is far from being sensible in an age founded on science and technology, since belief or faith belongs to a purely spiritual world. Moreover, deciding to have faith in the modern secular age can be definitely regarded as doing the unobvious instead of the obvious. Furthermore, "believing all your life what you believed at the start of it" (181) can refer to believing in not only a religious but also an enchanted world, which was advocated by Jean as a child. The multifaceted nature of courage symbolizes the indeterminability the characters face in the novel. Actually, the abundance of meaning assigned to such seemingly trivial concepts is frequently discussed explicitly or implicitly in other works of Barnes and in works of various postmodern writers. The crisis of meaning and referentiality manifests itself in the relativity of single concepts, an issue of inquiry present in most postmodern texts.

I would argue that the main characters, Jean and Gregory, remain on the level of mediocrity because they are unable to cast off their anxiety of uncertainty. While Jean, although disheartened, accepts that all the big questions remain unanswered, Gregory fails in making peace with the state of uncertainty. Still, neither of them succeeds in embracing the indeterminability of things. Barnes's text inherently refers to one particular form of eliminating this anxiety, and that is to take the courage to believe, which dovetails with the above mentioned courage motif. By acquiring the courage to believe, both central characters could act according to their desires instead of leading their lives determined by their fears. Jean is afraid of being disappointed once again and her fear is transmitted to Gregory who, probably due to his mother's influence, is unable to reach out and make meaningful connections. Neither character can believe in matters outside their world: Jean needs empirical proof, whereas Gregory requires rational reasoning to believe in the existence of things. However, the courage to believe refers to believing in a world where miracles may happen alongside the world of the ordinary. The enchanted world does not defy the world governed by reason, it merely supplements the latter. Man can never get the world of enchantment under his control, as the very moment he would succeed, this world would cease to exist.

Courage to believe is implicit in Jean's narrative: Jean experiences some form of sacred epiphany at the sight of the Grand Canyon which "stunned her into uncertainty" (98). She is unable to verbalize the feelings and thoughts the sight of the canyon triggers. However, the free indirect speech that follows introduces the issue of religion in Jean's discourse, which is also the first time religion arises as a matter of

inquiry in the novel: "It was said that one of the worst tragedies of the spirit was to be born with a religious sense into a world where belief was no longer possible. Was it an equal tragedy to be born without a religious sense into a world where belief *was* possible?" (99). This question enforces her image as an irreligious character who lacks the essential religious capability to embrace divine reality. Jean is unable to submerge herself in the idea of a world designed by a divine being because a world not based on reason but faith, a world that will remain hidden and impenetrable until you decide to believe in it, is inconceivable for Jean. Her character always longed for answers that would provide certainty. In her elderly years, Jean wanted things to "turn out properly, correctly, in accordance with [their] own logic" (125); in other words, life should not defy her, her own logic and her cumulated knowledge of the world.

While his mother's fear of disappointment is based on rational grounds, Gregory's fear of death leads him to spiritual grounds by asking the questions "[i]s death absolute?", "[i]s religion nonsense?", "[i]s there a God?" (185). Jean's fear of disappointment and Gregory's fear of death derive from their anxiety of uncertainty, the main reason for their mediocre lives, since Jean lacks the will, while her son lacks the courage, to believe in a spiritual mode of existence. The Grand Canyon incident that "stunned her into uncertainty" (98) shows that Jean understands why people see a divine reality behind the world we live in, yet she does not wish to join their community. Jean fails to acquire the religious sense that could enable her to embrace the sacred; therefore, life for her is a series of incidents due to her blindness to the mystery of life. Her character epitomizes the spiritually disabled modern individual who defies any religious view of life and suppresses the modern existential angst of man. Greg's obsession with death and suicide is the manifestation of how the modern individual is consumed by this existentialist despair. His theorizing leads to an infinite number of possibilities and alternatives of God scenarios and reaches a climactic point: "Enough thoughts. No more. […] Finally, you realized that question and answer were the same, that the one enclosed the other. Stop the loom, the futile chattering loom of human thought. Stare at the lighted window and just breathe" (189). This sudden halt implies either a surrender of his mind due to despair or a spiritual experience owing to a sudden epiphany. I propose the latter to be a more adequate reading of the section. Light has long been associated with the Divine Being, while inhalation suggests a shift from the cognitive to the bodily. The combination of Gregory's earlier line of "[b]elief should just happen"

(188) and the line of "[s]tare at the lighted window and just breathe" evoke the concept of self-transcendence introduced to the English literary world by Aldous Huxley in the Epilogue of *The Devils of Loudon*. Gregory's sudden spiritual awakening can be explained with the concept of the divine reality as both immanent and transcendent. Aldous Huxley claimed that man is capable of finding the divine being within himself: "man possesses a double nature, a phenomenal ego and an eternal Self, which is the inner man, the spirit, the spark of divinity within the soul. It is possible for a man, if he so desires, to identify himself with the spirit and therefore with the Divine Ground, which is of the same or like nature with the spirit."[12] Gregory's experience evokes Jean's epiphany at the Grand Canyon, owing to both characters' sudden halt and the closely associated motifs of the sun and the light. Having said that, Grergory's epiphany is left unelaborated and hence his spiritual awakening is debatable.

Staring at the Sun tells the story of Jean's disenchantment; therefore, following their common traits, Gregory is expected to pass through the same stages of disillusionment. However, the slow disenchantment of Jean seems to trigger an inverse process in the narrative itself. The third part of the tripartite structure denies readerly expectations on several levels, as both the mode of narration and the generic elements of the novel are altered. In terms of generic features, the novel "incorporate[s] elements of bildungsroman, historical fiction, political satire, and futuristic, speculative fiction."[13] The third chapter introduces the futuristic General Purpose Computer and TAT, both of which are conspicuously odd and raise more questions. The presence of different genres in the novel intensifies the tensions and contradictions in the book. With the increasing use of free indirect speech noted earlier, the narrative becomes more blurred as the novel proceeds. According to Elena Semino, "FIS [free indirect speech] is typically associated with the creation of distancing effects with respect to the character whose speech is being represented."[14] This distancing effect may question or deny the characters' insights, which in the case of Jean and Gregory undermines their faith in reason and their denial of the world as a place of miracle.

12. Qtd. in George Woodcock, *Dawn and the Darkest Hour: A Study of Aldous Huxley* (Montréal: Black Rose Books, 2007), p. 5.

13. Holmes, p. 124.

14. Elena Semino, *Representing Characters' Speech and Thought in Narrative Fiction* (Lancaster: Lancaster Eprints), p. 12, accessed 25 October 2014 <http://eprints.lancs.ac.uk/1238/1/England_England_Style_paper.pdf>.

The abundance of personifications in the final scene also exemplifies the changed narrative style and depicts an enchanted world hidden from the eyes of reason. This figure of speech is ingeniously placed here to imply the animate in the inanimate. Thus, the scene suggests the presence of the same Divine Reality that Gregory had partly experienced a few pages earlier. As the aeroplane gains height, Jean notices the Green Heaven, where as a child they had been "lying in Heaven and screaming at the sky" (194). The screaming game symbolizes modern man's irrational yearning for a holy Other; it is the manifestation of existential frustration intermingled with naive hope in the sacred. Jean's strong self-discipline – "[s]he did not smile and she tried very hard not to blink" (195) – shows her acceptance of death. This final act of Jean's defiance can be read as Barnes's decision to abandon religion in his search for meaning. However, the abundance of personifications on the last pages of the novel is significant: "the sky now provided its own hand; four broad fingers of cloud" (194); "[t]he fingers of cloud no longer lay between her and the sun. They were face to face"; "earth did not greedily chase it [the sun], but lay flatly back with its mouth open" (195). They reflect the insignificance of human life in comparison to the grand cycles of nature. Moreover, the final paragraphs suggest a hidden enchanted world which the characters, along with the readers, are also part of: the realm of the Divine that is immanent and transcendent at once.

In contrast to the earlier description of the sun setting in the Grand Canyon, the lavishly described embrace of the sky, the sun and the earth are so overwhelming in their vividness that Jean's spiritual resistance becomes irrelevant. Therefore, the reader, instead of admiring Jean's strength, only feels a sense of sorrow at her imminent death. Fuentes states that the main riddle posed in the novel is "are ordinary human beings condemned to ordinary, humdrum lives, or is there still a possibility of enchantment?"[15], which is valid, yet in the light of my analysis the loss of man's religious sense becomes more significant. By the end of the novel, the narrative has symbolically regained its mysticism and no longer confines itself to ordinary material reality. The ending of the book stuns the reader into uncertainty regarding the nonexistence of the transcendental instead of reassuring Jean's certainty in the nothingness behind the glow of the sun.

15. Carlos Fuentes, "The Enchanting Blue Yonder," *New York Times Book Review* 92 (12 April 1987), p. 3.

Miklós Mikecz

Personal as National/National as Personal

Interactions between Narrative Strands in Julian Barnes's *England, England*

"I do not believe in God but I miss him,"[1] begins Julian Barnes's *Nothing to be Frightened of* (2008), a memoir about death, religion, and mortality. This opening sentence does more than expressing the author's vexed relationship with God; the image of a non-believer longing for belief eloquently captures the peculiar type of sentiment that is Barnes's own, almost his trademark feature. Few would deny that the bread and butter of Barnes's works are irony and scepticism, questioning, if not ridiculing, apparently stable notions such as truth, memory, and history in a playful and sophisticated manner. Yet, apart from the overarching sense of cynicism that characterizes Barnes's authorial conduct, one can also find a humane warmth at the heart of his works that sometimes verges on sentimentality.

One of the possible answers for the emotionally touching aspects of Barnes's prose might lie in the specific treatment of his characters. To explain, his novels are populated with characters full of uncertainty and doubt in a seemingly meaningless world, where all the reassuring guidelines of the past seem to be stripped of their relevance. Yet, what often accompanies these characters' existential anxiety is a strong sense of longing for a firm conviction regarding the existence of an irrefutable truth that could govern their lives. As Matthew Pateman writes, all books of Barnes "have characters who are striving for some way of finding meaning in an increasingly depoliticized, secularized, localized, and depthless world."[2] Therefore, to reformulate the opening sentence of *Nothing to be Frightened of*, Barnes might give the impression that he does not believe in universal meaning and unwavering truth, but he sorely misses them, thus creating his characters in

1. Julian Barnes, *Nothing to be Frightened of* (London: Random House, 2008), p. 1.
2. Matthew Pateman, *Julian Barnes*, Writers and Their Work (Horndon: Northcote House, 2002), p. 2.

a way to be in constant pursuit of personal meaning and inner truth, even if such endeavours often prove to be unfruitful.

This is especially true in the case of Barnes's *England, England*[3] (1998), since it casts its protagonist, Martha Cochrane, as a cynical sceptic hardened by life, who nevertheless believes in the idea that happiness is attainable for her through the search for a meaning that would elucidate her private life. However, the protagonist's quest throughout the novel for truth about herself is only half of the story and, in fact, it is the less spectacular strand of the novel: *England, England* is more readily recognized as the story recounting the outlandish project of building an enormous leisure resort on the theme of England, in which the replicas of all the characteristic places and natural sights of the country, as well as the enactments of the various decisive events in English history, are presented together in order to convey the essence of Englishness. For those for whom *England, England* is about this story, the novel is a farcical take on the tangled relationship between the original and the constructed as it pertains to the identity of an England that seeks to define itself through its supposedly authentic traditions, yet constantly has to confront the possibility that those traditions are no more than mere inventions of a hazy past.

However, as already indicated, the novel is not only a story about Englishness but also the private story of the protagonist. As Barnes says in an interview,

> [t]here are these disparities and opposing extremes running through the book between the public and the private, between the fake and the authentic. […] And what's happening in the public story is the creation of something that is completely false and what's going on in the private story is the search for some sort of inner truth about life and love.[4]

In simplified terms, the novel is in fact two novels or, more precisely, two narrative strands in one text. Seemingly, the two narrative layers intersect each other only at the rarest of occasions, since their stylistic registers are fundamentally different: the public story of the Project is farcical, satirical, comic and thoroughly suffused with irony, while

3. All parenthesized references are to this edition: Julian Barnes, *England, England* (London: Picador, 1998).

4. Qtd. in Frederick M. Holmes, *Julian Barnes*, New British Fiction (Basingstoke; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), p. 93.

Martha's private biography is more serious, melancholic, emotional, philosophical, often moving and occasionally sad. As regarding their relation to each other, the public story is placed in the foreground and the private story seems to play only a secondary role. However, closer scrutiny can reveal that the novel contains passages which are suggestive of subdued, nevertheless palpable relations between Martha's story and the story related to England and Englishness. Therefore, the aim of the present essay is to investigate various instances of interpenetration between the private and the public stories within the novel, to assess the consequences of these narrative strategies, and to prove that the text contains traces of a closer proximity between these two layers.

England, England utilizes a conventional tripartite structure that encloses a large middle part with a prologue and an epilogue. The prologue concentrates on the childhood memories of Martha and it is her private story that dominates this section, while the much larger middle part fleshes out the realization of the grandiose plan of Sir Jack Pitman, which, for the most part, is concerned with telling the public story of the novel. Martha is employed by Pitman to fulfil the position of the "Appointed Cynic," whose acidic remarks are expected to make a certain contribution to the development of the Project, as it is simply referred to. Eventually, the original plan of the Project to offer the replica of the real thing in a compressed version on the Isle of Wight slowly gives way to the birth of a new country called England, England. During the arduous process of assembling the mini-country, Martha develops a romantic relationship with another employee, Paul Harrison and, due to an unexpected chain of events, the couple manages to outplay Pitman through blackmail and force him to resign. While Martha becomes the CEO of the establishment, her relationship with Paul eventually deteriorates to such an extent that Pitman manages to convince Paul to become an ally in undermining Martha's leadership. The ploy proves to be successful, thus leaving Martha with no other option but to quit. The epilogue is set in a future England that has collapsed due to the overarching success of its replica, England, England. Once again, this section concentrates on the private story of Martha, yet one can also find relatively large portions of text concerned with adding the final touches to the public story by describing the concrete details of the downfall of "Old England." This desolate, pre-industrial country becomes the home for the aged Martha, who is depicted as stoically observing the first steps of the fallen country rebuilding itself by the

invention of new myths and traditions, just as the Project did on the Isle of Wight.

The prologue, entitled "England," is dedicated to the portrayal of the protagonist's reminiscences of her childhood and starts off with a series of loosely connected ruminations on the nature of personal memories. Martha is shown to mistrust her memories because of their self-deceptive nature, since "a memory was by definition not a thing, it was [...] a memory. A memory now of a memory a bit earlier of a memory before that of a memory way back then" (3). Furthermore,

> if a memory wasn't a thing but a memory of a memory of a memory, mirrors set in parallel, then what the brain told you now about what it claimed had happened then would be coloured by what had happened in between. It was like a country remembering its history: the past was never just the past, it was what made the present able to live with itself. The same went for individuals, though the process wasn't straightforward. (6)

Even at this early stage of the novel, one can see an instance of bringing into close proximity the private and the public domains as personal memories are likened to the remembrance that a country might have regarding its own history. Undoubtedly, this comparison partially functions as a device of foreshadowing the later stages of the text when Englishness and the history of England as major themes would come into the forefront. One can find numerous instances of this type of foreshadowing in the prologue that, at least in principle, should only be concerned with the tentative recollection of Martha's intimate childhood memories. Yet the prologue is also scattered sparsely with motifs related to England, which intrude repeatedly into Martha's reminiscences: the vivid depiction of a typically English Agricultural Show that Martha visited with her parents; the particular manner in which Martha was taught the subject of History in her primary school; and, most memorably, the memories related to a Counties of England jigsaw puzzle that Martha used to play with as a child. The latter is by far the most often cited and analysed passage in the book:

> she would get to the end [of finishing the puzzle] and a piece would be missing. Leicestershire, Derbyshire, Nottinghamshire, Warwickshire, Staffordshire – it was usually one of them – whereupon a sense of desolation, failure, and disappointment at

> the imperfection of the world would come upon her, until Daddy, who always seemed to be hanging around at this moment, would find the missing piece in the unlikeliest place. What *was* Staffordshire doing in his trouser pocket? How could it have got there? Had she seen it jump? Did she think the cat put it there? And she would smile her Nos and head-shakes at him, because Staffordshire had been found, and her jigsaw, her England, and her heart had been made whole again. (5–6)

These memories of the missing pieces gain increasing significance in the light of what is going to happen: the disappearance of Martha's father who leaves behind his family for good and whose act of betrayal coincides with the disappearance of the piece of Nottinghamshire, rendering Martha's puzzle permanently incomplete. What Martha as a child can deduce from all of this is that "Daddy had gone off to find Nottinghamshire" and "he'd be back and all would be well again" (14).

The location of Nottinghamshire on the map of England is quite significant: it sits right at the centre of it, at the very heart of it all. The missing piece comes to signal the trauma that Martha suffers upon the loss of her father, who had left her behind with a sign of lack, leaving a "fretsaw-cut hole within her" (24). Yet again, this jigsaw image might be regarded as a narrative device of foreshadowing which provides the reader a passage that can be argued to contain in a condensed form the basic tenets of the main theme of the novel that would be duly demonstrated later on its ensuing pages. As already mentioned, the elaboration of this central theme involves the satirical portrayal of endeavours to assemble a mini-sized replica of England that goes along with insinuating doubts about the authenticity of established notions concerning the history of England and Englishness in general. This strategy gives way to a growing sense of awareness about the duplicities involved in the social and cultural make-up of England as a nation-state. The identity of the country comes to be represented as a construct with an overall structure that is made possible by various inventions and distortions of such an extent that there seems to be no real essence of the country that could be unearthed. Instead, one is presented with disarray and supplied with countless individual fragments that do not add up to a coherent picture that would be wholly original and not copied partially from elsewhere. The fragmentary state of Martha's jigsaw map of England comes to correspond to the fragmentary state of England's identity that was assumed to be

authentic. The incomplete jigsaw map that signifies the protagonist's private loss and the incoherence caused by the lack of an ultimate definition of Englishness are, therefore, mirroring each other. The loss of the father that generates an all-encompassing mistrust of the world for the protagonist might be seen as a metaphor for the loss of belief in the capacity of one's fatherland, in this case England, to provide one with the means to unearth, or at least to construct a representation of, the essence of the country.

The desired effect of the jigsaw passage is to evoke nostalgic feelings for a lost innocence in the reader, for a sense of wholeness that is now fractured to pieces. The image might be regarded to express one's sentiments upon the realization that the identity of one's own country is far from being unified; in fact, it is composed of a plethora of differing and therefore contesting voices. In this scheme, the role of national traditions is to act as a remedy to the excess of different perspectives. In addition, what is highly peculiar in the jigsaw image is that it emphasizes fragmentariness and disunity along with the wholeness and the unity that reside in its poetic economy. The jigsaw image establishes various metaphoric links within the novel in such an explicit manner and with such conspicuous potential that it comes to be increasingly close to being somewhat obtrusive in its obviousness. Consider the conjoining of the italicized phrases in the following sentence: "because Staffordshire had been found, *her jigsaw*, *her England*, and *her heart* had been made whole again" (6, emphasis added). No wonder that virtually every critic assigns crucial significance to the image and expresses an opinion about what it might signify, and, in doing so, quite dissimilar interpretations are created. Sebastian Groes and Peter Childs, when discussing the gaps and omissions that are so characteristic of Barnes's novels, maintain that the missing piece obtains an enigmatic status in the overall economy of the novel: "on its part, *England, England* rests on the missing jigsaw piece at the heart of Martha's map of Britain."[5] Matthew Pateman writes that the image "is a handy metaphor for the idea of a country being constructed, arbitrarily divided into administrative centres, historically open to change."[6] Dominic Head states that the "[l]oss of faith in the Counties of England jigsaw, with its bald certitude about the composition of

5. Sebastian Groes and Peter Childs, "Julian Barnes and the Wisdom of Uncertainty," in *Julian Barnes*, Contemporary Critical Perspectives, eds. Sebastian Groes and Peter Childs (London; New York: Continuum, 2011), 1–10, p. 9.

6. Pateman, p. 76.

England, signals a haziness about origins."[7] Vanessa Guignery asserts that the "image provides a metaphor for the essence of history and memory, whose wholeness is a mere illusion."[8] For Barbara Korte, the jigsaw puzzle is "an obvious image for the postmodern idea that all nations are constructs."[9] Richard Bradford's reading of the image is even more peculiar; he dismisses the obvious interpretive potentials by maintaining that "from a hand much less subtle than Barnes's such a passage might beg for explanation, the unpicking of registers of private loss from the broader fabric of a fragmented, forgotten nation."[10] As it seems, Bradford cannot accept at face value such a suspiciously straightforward and overtly direct metaphor that links private matters and the state of England in a compact, unified form, because such a possibility would be at odds with Barnes's skills as an author. But, perhaps, there exists a way other than defending Barnes and surmising that the author's intention must have been something altogether different from what seems to be the case. Barnes's intention might well have been to give an impression of *not* being subtle at all. Accordingly, one could approach the problem of the interpretation of the image by following the internal logic of the text and reminding oneself that the passage presents one of Martha's memories, and the reason why it is constructed so blatantly and is granted such a central position is because the overall recollection of the protagonist's childhood in the prologue is done from the perspective of the adult Martha. "We invent, ransack and reorder our childhood,"[11] as Barnes himself says in the interview already quoted. Therefore, the blatancy of the jigsaw image might be explicable by it being the product of such a reordering process; in other words, the product of the creation of a personal myth that functions to show how the early childhood of Martha in fact anticipated the later events in her life, especially her involvement with the Project to disassemble and then reassemble England on a smaller scale. It might easily be the case that Barnes, once again, plays an elab-

7. Dominic Head, *The Cambridge Introduction to Modern British Fiction, 1950–2000* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 120.

8. Vanessa Guignery, *The Fiction of Julian Barnes: A Reader's Guide to Essential Criticism*, Readers' Guides to Essential Criticism (Basingstoke; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), p. 106.

9. Barbara Korte, "Julian Barnes's *England, England*: Tourism as a Critique of Postmodernism," in *The Making of Modern Tourism: The Cultural History of the British Experience, 1600–2000*, eds. Hartmut Berghoff, Barbara Korte, Ralf Schneider, Christopher Harvie (Basingstoke; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 285–304, pp. 288–9.

10. Richard Bradford, "Julian Barnes's *England, England* and Englishness," in *Julian Barnes*, Contemporary Critical Perspectives, 92–102, p. 100.

11. Qtd. in Holmes, p. 92.

orate game with the reader and deliberately includes the jigsaw image in his text in this particularly obvious manner in order to demonstrate his own maxim that childhood memories cannot be taken as innocent facts but are products of acts of recollection, since various distorting processes are always involved. In our case, the memory lends an encompassing priority to a (reconstructed) event from the past that explains in its own way the present circumstances, which happens to be the major theme of the book.

If the above interpretation seemed a little too speculative, then there exists an even more complex interpretative possibility, according to which the jigsaw image could be seen as a manifestation of Barnes's frequently mentioned self-reflexive style. In this case, Barnes emphasizes the central theme of the work – namely the inevitably constructed nature of all narratives pertaining to notions or identities – by an act of using a blatantly construed image to comment upon the fabricated nature of his own text. In other words, the image serves to stress the idea that his novel is not an exception; it is the result of multifarious constructions, similar to the identity of England that it portrays. Admittedly, this line of argumentation may be too speculative for its own good, as it attempts to present an assumed shortcoming of the text as its strength. Nevertheless, these speculative endeavours to explain an innocent image prove a very important point, namely that the jigsaw image powerfully suggests its own crucial importance in any interpretation of the novel as a whole.

The large middle section of the novel, entitled "England, England," is undoubtedly the motor of the whole narrative, recounting the subsequent stages of the assembly of the leisure resort as well as the phases of the romantic relationship that develops between Martha and Paul. While the public story on the larger scale and the private story that is restricted to the relationship of the couple are unfolding side-by-side, the two narrative layers intersect only on two occasions. The first occurs near the end of the section when Martha's relationship with Paul already starts to falter and she finds numerous things that she cannot share with him. In order to understand Martha's line of thought, which is fundamentally about her own nature, identity and self, one must be familiar with certain episodes that happen prior to this scene. The first such episode depicts a conference room meeting where Sir Jack and his employees, including Martha and Paul, discuss nature as opposed to urban surroundings. Consider Sir Jack's opinion on the subject:

> I stood on a hill the other day and looked down an undulating field past a copse towards a river and as I did so a pheasant stirred beneath my feet. You, as a person *passing through*, would no doubt have assumed that Dame Nature was going about her eternal business. I knew better, Mark. The hill was an Iron Age burial mound, the undulating field a vestige of Saxon agriculture, the copse was a copse only because a thousand other trees had been cut down, the river was a canal and the pheasant had been hand-reared by a gamekeeper. We change it all, Mark, the trees, the crops, the animals. And now, follow me further. That lake you discern on the horizon is a reservoir, but when it has been established a few years, when fish swim in it and migrating birds make it a port of call, when the treeline has adjusted itself and little boats ply their picturesque way up and down it, when these things happen it becomes, triumphantly, a lake, don't you see? It becomes *the thing itself*. (60–1)

Therefore, according to Sir Pitman's argument, the countryside he was visiting, contrary to its appearance, was and is continuously constructed by culture and society; nature, instead of being a source of pure origins, is merely a man-made construct. The process is depicted to work even further: an artificial segment of the landscape, a reservoir can turn into a lake as if it were the product of completely natural processes. Hence, the opposition between nature and culture is presented to be increasingly ambiguous and entirely arbitrary.

The second scene that will be important to understand Martha's reasoning about her identity involves a conversation with Dr Max, the Official Historian of the Project, by whom she is told that a patch of wetland near them is specifically designed to discourage certain birds from approaching the area. After she asks Paul whether he thinks that people are like that patch of land, that is, "[t]he whole business of who you … click with and who you don't" (136), her conclusion is that people might indeed be like that and "you could say there *is* a pattern, but it's one we don't know, or can't understand. That there is something guiding us without our knowing" (137).

Therefore, human nature is also conceived as being constructed and specifically designed according to a set of so far unknown principles. When listing the things that she cannot tell Paul, Martha thinks, among others, the following thoughts. Notice her ideas regarding her own nature and identity:

These were some of the things she was unable to say:

— that none of it was his fault;
— that despite Dr Max's historical scepticism, she believed in happiness;
  […]
— but […] her happiness depended on being true to yourself;
— true to your nature;
— that is, true to your heart;
— but the main problem, life's central predicament, was, how did you know your own heart?;
— and the surrounding problem was, how did you know what your nature was?;
— that most people located their nature in childhood
  [...]
— here was a photo of herself when young, frowning against the sun and sticking out her lower lip: was this her nature or only her mother's poor photography?;
— but what if this nature was no more natural than the nature Sir Jack had satirically delineated after a walk in the country?;
— because if you were unable to locate your nature, your chance of happiness was surely diminished;
— or what if locating your nature was like locating a patch of wetland, whose layout remained mysterious, and whose workings indecipherable?;
— that despite favourable conditions, and lack of encumbrances, and despite the fact that she thought she might love Paul, she had not felt happy. (226–7)

Martha comes to question the natural foundations of her identity when her doubts about her childhood as a source of truth arise again in the same way as she was shown to mistrust her memories in general. Martha is depicted to seriously entertain the idea that her identity is fabricated, much like the countryside Sir Jack was walking in or that patch of wetland that has a certain conceptual design that Dr Max was talking about. Therefore, the central theme of the public story regarding the constructed and invented nature of the nation-state of England is conjoined with the emerging theme of Martha's private story, namely the possibly constructed nature of her identity.

It is at the very end of the section that the narrative truly reveals Martha's thoughts on the Project, after she has been betrayed by Paul

and forced to resign from her post as CEO and leave the Isle of Wight. The scene takes place in the church of St Aldwyn "in one of the few parts of the Island still unclaimed by the Project" (218), where Martha goes in the hope to find salvation "among the remnants of a greater, discarded system of salvation" (236). The text presents Martha's stream of consciousness split into two inner voices conducting a fierce debate about "a recognition that life, despite everything, has a capacity for seriousness," which leads to the proposition that "life must be more serious if it has a structure, if there is something larger out there than yourself" (236). According to the side of Martha that argues for this idea, "[l]ife is more serious, and therefore better, and therefore bearable, if there is some larger context" (237). Sickened by the sham she helped to develop, and even governed for a while, as well as hurt by the failed relationship which drove her to the conclusion that maybe "love was not the answer for her" (227), Martha is portrayed as longing for an idealized past where the certainty about one's position in the world as well as one's relation to it could be taken for granted. This side of her maintains that if life has no pattern to it, "[i]f life is a triviality, then despair is the only option" (236). The cynical side of Martha mocks such statements and calls them instances of "sentimental yearning" (237), as "[b]rittle cynicism is a truer response to the modern world" (237). In her most important thought, Martha concludes that "[a]n individual's loss of faith and a nation's loss of faith" (237) are more or less the same, the text once again making obvious parallels between the private and the public domains. Martha is referring to herself and to her own absence of faith, which she compares to the present state of England: "Look what happened to England. Old England. It stopped believing in things. Oh, it still muddled along. It did OK. But it lost seriousness" (237).

Indeed, one is faced here with the pressing dilemma of what is to be done if it turns out that certain notions and concepts are no longer trustworthy: is it possible to continue to believe in them in any form or manner, even if their incoherence cannot be denied any more? Martha's answer is surprisingly harsh: some larger context is necessary for life to be better, even if that context "is arbitrary and cruel, even if its laws are false and unjust" (237). Martha's cynical side responds to this by alluding to such sins of the past as the Inquisition or the great dictators. Eventually, the "sentimental" side of Martha gives up, believing that one is no longer capable of talking about things like these, since, as she reasoned earlier, "the words, the serious words,

have been used up over the centuries […] [t]he words don't seem to fit the thoughts nowadays" (237). Her resolution to solve the issue is to forget words altogether, or, as she says to herself, "[l]et the words run out, Martha" (238).

At this point, the text brings up the image of the "Heavens to Betsy" incident that was the basis for the logo of the entire Project, based on the supposedly real story of an English woman in the nineteenth century who was swept off a cliff by the wind but, thanks to her umbrella and her undergarments which acted as parachutes, she was miraculously saved and landed safely:

> Into her mind came an image, one shared by earlier occupants of these pews. Not Guilliamus Trentinus, of course, or Anne Potter, but perhaps known to Ensign Robert Timothy Pettigrew, and Christina Margaret Benson, and James Thorogood and William Petty. A woman swept and hanging, a woman half out of this world, terrified and awestruck, yet in the end safely delivered. A sense of falling, falling, falling, which we have every day of our lives, and then an awareness that the fall was being made gentler, was being arrested, by an unseen current whose existence no-one suspected. A short, eternal moment that was absurd, improbable, unbelievable, true. Eggs cracked from the slight concussion of landing, but nothing more. The richness of all subsequent life after that moment.
>
> Later the moment had been appropriated, reinvented, copied, coarsened; she herself had helped. But such coarsening always happened. The seriousness lay in celebrating the original image: getting back there, seeing it, feeling it. [...] Part of you might suspect that the magical event had never occurred, or at least not as it was now supposed to have done. But you must also celebrate the image and the moment even if it had never happened. That was where the little seriousness of life lay. (238)

The event that served as a basis for the logo of the Project appears in this passage in a remarkably different light. Although the image was made to stand as the emblem for a falsified and copied England, here it is made to be devoid of the grossly inappropriate connotations that its connection to the Project would entail. Martha recognizes herself in the terrified woman of the image and, in her emotional despair, she seeks consolation in the possibility that, after all, she can be saved as well.

The image represents in its purity a possibility of hope and redemption as well as a partial answer to Martha's question regarding the lost seriousness of life. The larger context that Martha was depicted to long for appears here in the form of an extraordinary moment that is capable of convincing one about the possibility of a life-altering change that can save one from anguish, that is, the sense of falling "which we have every day of our lives" (238).

At this point of the narration the story of the Project and Martha's story meet for a second time and merge through the inclusion of this particular image. The Project exploited the image of the falling woman with an open umbrella to create a catchy logo for its enterprise. Sir Jack exclaimed with joy upon hearing the story behind the image: "I love it. I don't believe a word of it, but I love it. It's *here* and it's *magic* and we can make it into *now*" (122). Similarly, Martha exploits the symbolic potential of the image to create for herself a meaningful, if disillusioned narrative with an accompanying explanation, namely that authenticity plays no part in the contemplation and celebration of such extraordinary moments and images. What does matter is that such moments and images can offer a means of enriching one's life, aiding one in overcoming obstacles, and helping to feel closer to those generations of the past for whom these moments and images meant something similarly personal. If Martha could not find the answers she was looking for, and if she is unable to relocate the lost seriousness of life, at least here, with the help of this image, she finds some sort of solace. The image connects the Project's search for self-identity and Martha's search for personal meaning, thereby merging in a subtle manner the public and the private stories.

The last section of the novel, entitled "Albion," portrays Old England in a state of collapse: Anglia, as it is called now, is depicted as a nation-state that had reverted to its own rural, pre-industrialized past, a "place of yokeldom and willed antiquarianism" (254). Once again, the childhood memories of Martha involving the Counties of England jigsaw puzzle seem to anticipate in their own way specific events that would occur later in the novel:

> Her mother told her less often that men were either wicked or weak. She told her instead that women had to be strong and look after themselves because nobody else could be relied upon to do it for them.

> In response to this, Martha made a decision. Each morning, before leaving for school, she pulled the jigsaw box from beneath her bed, opened the lid with her eyes closed, and took out a county. […] On the bus, she would reach behind her and push the county down the back of the seat. […] There were about fifty counties to dispose of, and so it took her almost the whole term. She threw the sea and the box into the dustbin. (17)

The image of Martha as a child progressively getting rid of the pieces of the puzzle can be easily regarded as a metaphor for the decline of Old England that had "progressively shed power, territory, wealth, influence and population" (251) and, at its endpoint, had terminated its "old administrative division into counties" (253) to replace them by provinces "based upon the kingdoms of the Anglo-Saxon heptarchy" (253). Martha's decision to throw away the pieces of the puzzle piecemeal was born out of learning from her mother that she had to be strong on her own because her father would never come back to bring with him the missing piece that would complete the puzzle and, even more importantly, to make the family once again a unified whole. The discarding of the puzzle pieces is the sign of the full apperception of her loss, although she does not know "whether she was meant to remember or to forget the past" (17).

England's decay, on the other hand, is partially the result of its unsuccessful attempt to compete with its replica, England, England, that took away the distinctive features of Englishness from the original country to such an extent that "Old England had lost its history, and therefore – since memory is identity – had lost all sense of itself" (251). The image of the gradual disposal of the pieces of the jigsaw puzzle and the description of the steady disintegration of England are echoing each other, as both events were triggered by a sense of loss; no matter how toned down, there exists a metaphoric connection between this specific episode of Martha's private (hi)story and the latest stage of the public history of England.

Once again, one might stipulate that the reason Martha remembers this action of hers so vividly can be explained by the fact that it reminds her of the decline of England, yet such a line of argument, once again, would remain a speculation. Nevertheless, the text portrays the slow disintegration of England twice: entirely figuratively at first, as the pieces of the jigsaw England are gradually discarded, but quite lit-

erally the second time, since England as a nation-state is depicted as falling apart.

All of the above examples prove that there are indeed palpable connections between the personal and the national or public levels within the novel. The question of what purpose they serve from the point of view of the narrative remains. One of the possible answers is that these passages of the novel function to bring into closer proximity the two stories of the novel in order to increase cohesion in the narrative. In this way, the novel provides the reader with several points of connection between the otherwise separate narrative domains, which helps one to connect the several disparate themes and create an interpretation of the novel as a unified whole.

The more problematic answer is that they emphasize the possibility that meaningful correlation does exist between the inner workings of the individual and the mechanisms of society at large. Yet, all of the connections between the private and the public within the novel are elaborate constructions engendered by the narrative to provide the reader with a sense of unity, a unity which is quite duplicitous. Take, for instance, the much analysed jigsaw image. The missing piece signifies loss experienced by the individual and loss related to the country as a whole, which, according to the novel, is the loss of faith in a straightforwardly meaningful existence, both in terms of private and public lives. Thus, unity between the personal and the public level is achieved only to give expression to the reign of disunity, symbolized by the doubly significant missing piece. In other words, unity in form is used to express disunity in content. One can observe the same phenomenon in all of the other instances as well. Consider the view that nature in the sense of the material world is a social construct surprisingly similar to human nature and individual identity: the chief meaning that can be excavated from these two pieces of observation is that they correlate. Once again, one is presented with harmonious narrative unity that masks potentially disharmonious relativism.

"I do not believe in God but I miss him,"[12] writes Barnes. It seems that he does not believe in solid meaning either but he does seem to miss it, at least as demonstrated by his tendency to wrap ambiguities and ambivalences in nicely formed, seemingly symmetrical structures that emanate a sense of unity and suggest stable meaning. This tendency is given expression through a variety of examples in *England, England*. These examples aptly demonstrate Barnes's talent for arrang-

12. Barnes, *Nothing*, p. 1.

ing patterns of unity that are capable of achieving their artistic effect despite the overall sense of doubt that pervades the novel. Barnes's insistence on creating structures of unity that are in contrast with the postmodern relativism of his texts might be one of the decisive features of his prose that set him apart as an author from other contemporary writers of British fiction.

Epilogue:
The Barnesian Text

Define Barnesian.
Take two subjects.
Not that you believe in autonomous subjects or you are interested specifically in the ones you take. Just take any two. By the time you finish your work, they will resemble you anyway.
If you are not happy with them, one of your subjects might as well be an object. A piece of jigsaw puzzle. My two suitcases. *Or* the parrot.
If there are no suitable subjects or objects around, take their memory. Their first memory. *That* will surely help you start posing your questions. About those heavy topics.
Pose them.
Take two subjects.
In the pale orange light of your questions – let them pose.

Eszter Szép

The Barnesian text is open; it is self-contradictory, multifaceted, metaphorical and ironic.
You never know where you are in it but you know you will be reminded of your uncertain location by strong intratextual markers reinforcing textual cohesion. These markers will range from verbal repetition through variation and adaptation to multiple metaphorical levels of text and meaning. Markers may include verbal or textual references, generic references, geographical references, cultural references, references to other authors, mentioned often enough to notice the repetition in spite of the strong elements that pull the Barnesian text apart by refusing to provide a linear plot, a consistent narrative strategy or a unified structure.
A Barnesian text is strongly intertextual; and the references will very often point cross channel. The intertextual links will be primarily literary but can also be cultural in a wider sense, even including the political.
The Barnesian text works through metaphors even when it avoids metaphors. Metaphors will cluster around certain concepts such as language, writing, love and Englishness.
The Barnesian text is English. It is an English gentleman's text; the text of an English intellectual, that of an English writer, who is trying not to feel sorry for himself.
The Barnesian text will have a Barnesian narrator, who will be a sad English person, preferably male. Female characters and narrators will tend to be strong, no-nonsense, unimaginative but perfectly capable of living their lives according to their own wills, values, preferences or unexamined presuppositions.
Barnesian narrators may be slightly autistic; at any rate, they will have difficulties reading other characters' behaviours and emotions and will be somewhat bewildered by other living persons.
For the Barnesian narrator, dead authors and dead texts appear much safer.

Judit Friedrich

A fundamental feature of a "Barnesian" text is its observable postmodern nature, though not in the fashion of the "classical" postmodern practised by Pynchon or late Beckett. Barnesian texts are often preoccupied with competing parallel universes which mutually exclude each other yet are, in a sense, necessary for the existence of the other (e.g., belief versus scepticism, youth versus old age). Although the Lyotardian postmodern "incredulity towards metanarratives" is typical of Barnes, a Barnesian text is never as desperately experimental or as eager to subvert the existing order as, for instance, a Pynchon text. Subversion in the Barnesian text lies rather in its playful humour and, of course, in its irony. I might call it 'mild postmodern.'

The Barnesian text often undermines itself in a postmodern manner by the confusion of different ontological universes (e.g., dream versus reality), but never so aggressively that it would hinder coherent worldviews shaped in the text. The Barnesian text is unreliable; it often merges real life and fiction (e.g., in the characters), and thus aims at subverting established views on both.

The Barnesian text is full of vivid, striking images that support its ironic mode. A metaphorical imagery is typical to Barnes's novels, which also abound in poetical features such as echoing structures or epiphoras.

Most importantly, the Barnesian text is brilliantly, educatedly and confusingly intertextual. It is so perhaps in a slightly fortuitous manner, probably also seeking to enter into the great postmodern game which – according to Brian McHale – aims at deconditioning the reader and undermining readerly expectations to find meanings and solutions in the text. The Barnesian text provides the reader with a polyphony of voices and gives him/her the opportunity to form judgements, whether these are in or out of harmony.

Ágnes Harasztos

For me, a Barnesian text...
... is an experiment. An experiment to grasp the nature of recurring issues like identity formation and growing up; time, memory and history; religion, death and suicide; men vs women and sexuality; and defining Englishness.
... is a quest for an authorial voice, or for a definition of being an author, manifested in the image of the parrot and in the minute analysis of, and more or less constant references to, Flaubert's life and works, or in the godlike gesture of throwing something (e.g., a letter in Tony Webster's case) into a character's life and seeing what happens.
... challenges the reader. It leads the reader on according to its own purposes by using subjective viewpoints and irony, and controlling the amount of information provided. Thus, the reader will sense a degree of unreliability, the text will evoke suspicion, even unease, and it will be up to the reader to decide what to believe.
... teaches by asking questions. By raising problems related to everyday life (and death), the Barnesian text invites the reader to (re)consider these questions and reflect on his/her own life and status in the world.
... creates the Barnesian character. Whether mediocre and average, or a highly educated scholar, the Barnesian character tends to wonder about life instead of living it and to meditate on the issues mentioned above instead of taking action. Often, he fails to be in control of his life and realises only in hindsight, when it is probably too late, what has become of him – a person he once desperately wanted to avoid becoming. It is, however, not only Christopher Lloyd in *Metroland*, George in *Staring at the Sun*, Geoffrey Braithwaite in *Flaubert's Parrot*, or Tony Webster in *The Sense of an Ending* that can be looked upon as Barnesian characters, but also Barnes himself as he is depicted in *Nothing to be Frightened of*. There, similarly to Tony, Barnes wonders about the deficiencies of his memory, which is challenged by his brother's version of their past. Like these four characters, he is paralysed by his fear of death and keeps wondering about suicide, euthanasia and the possibility of a Zolaesque *belle mort*. Moreover, a number of autobiographical elements and anecdotes mentioned in *Metroland* resurface in *Nothing to be Frightened of*, morphing Barnes into a character resembling Christopher.
Thus, a Barnesian text is also a means of self-reflection for the author himself.

Dóra Vecsernyés

Barnesian /ˈbɑːnziən/ *adj*. **1** written by or related to Julian Barnes: *Flaubert's Parrot is arguably the most ~ of all his novels* **2** (of style) wry, erudite, clever, playful, seemingly distanced but deeply personal at heart **3** concerned with art, love, memory and the fear of death.

My admiration for Barnes dates back to my undergraduate years, when I was introduced to *A History of the World in 10½ Chapters*. For several consecutive years, I kept reading everything by him which I managed to lay my hands on. Four years later I wrote my MA dissertation about his work but decided to read on. When I was living in London, I was lucky to hear him speak during an event promoting *Nothing to be Frightened of*. I remember telling him afterwards (while he was signing my copy of the memoir) that he meant as much to me as Flaubert had meant for him (to which he said, "That's very sweet of you"). In one of the interviews I read at the time, Barnes let slip that he lived near Tuffnell Park Tube station, which I felt compelled to visit the following day. I also made a trip to Northwood on the Metropolitan Line – Barnes's childhood home and the setting of *Metroland*. By then, Barnes had been more than my favourite writer – I was perhaps becoming (only slightly) obsessed with him in the way that Geoffrey Braithwaite is with his French master. Some weeks later I had the privilege of attending the "Julian Barnes and the European Tradition" conference in Liverpool, which was also attended by its hero. During a brief chat, I admitted to having visited Tuffnell Park for his benefit, to which he reacted with mock horror at standing face to face with a stalker and said, "Oh, you know what? I don't actually live in London at all. I live up in Norwich!" Those two meetings mark the peak of my fascination with Barnes. For the next several years, I found myself appreciating his new books a little bit less. I did not value *The Sense of an Ending* as highly as most critics (and the jury of the Man Booker Prize) did, and I turned to other writers. Recently, however, I had to reread *Metroland*, which I was half-expecting to find disappointing. Instead, I admired the novel more than ever before. I feel relieved that my scepticism was only a phase. I would perhaps still maintain my (rather light) charge that the narrators of his novels often articulate ideas and hold opinions that Barnes would also subscribe to. But – when placed alongside his stylistic finesse, his remarkable experiments with generic forms and his Flaubertian dedication to "gazing into the black pit" – that really is a minor criticism.

Wojciech Drąg

When I consider a book characteristically "Barnesian," the style is of utmost importance for me. Barnes's characteristic style is easily recognisable; however, what this style exactly consists of is rather difficult to grasp. Probably the most appropriate adjectives are elegant, sophisticated, pleasant and diverse, though the Barnesian text always has a little ironic overtone, an ironic edge which does not let his reader ease off completely. For instance, the way he uses curses and swear words in his prose is very typical. He (mostly unexpectedly) drops these harsh expressions here and there in his streams of polished sentences. This sharp contrast – among many other techniques – also reinforces his ironic tone, ranging from the subtle to the most poignant, with which he criticises not only the phenomena or characters appearing in his work but the reader as well.

Aside from his peculiar style of writing, his choice of themes is something that must be mentioned. Probably the most important topic around which all other minor sub-topics may be arranged is the relation of the present to the past. Myriads of questions may be posed: How do we know the past? Can we know it at all? How do we confront the events/harms/wounds of the past in the present? What effects do they have? How can we deal with memories or how can we remember? Is it possible to remember? How do consciousness, memories or even persons, personalities or relationships change over time? How can we relate to history – to our own or to history in general? How do we account for our past mistakes? And so on... From these questions we may turn to the characters themselves posing questions on questioning in Barnes's novels, as the theme of questioning is also a beloved topic of his: How do we ask the right questions? Can we ask good questions at all? At the end we always get back to the root of the problem, to a state of uncertainty: namely, that we cannot ever even learn the right questions, let alone the right answers.

A key method of Barnes – which is, of course, also indispensable to the Barnesian type of writing – is that in his novels he relentlessly holds back information. The reader constantly has the feeling that something is deferred; what we get are only crumbs of information and he is holding back the most surprising things. We cannot be sure of anything until the very end of his books, and the punch line is always shocking. This technique may arouse irritation, frustration or suspense in the reader; some feel it pleasant, some unpleasant, but it is certainly a most effective technique.

Barnesian fiction is usually written in the first person singular and tends to be autobiographical, or centres around one particular character on which the narrative focuses. Although most of Barnes's novels belong to the genre of fictional autobiography, he usually mixes other genres in his writing. From journalistic excerpts to university examinations, we find a range of different elements lifted from other – often even non-fictional – genres.

Dorottya Jászay

We were talking about writers and autism, and you proposed that I start with that issue. Julian Barnes is definitely not autistic, based on his texts that I have read so far. His observations regarding the finer details of other people simply rule out that possibility. Although one might trace some tendency of inwardness to be present in his narratives, I believe that his aim is to write about people rather than about things or ideas. He seems to me to put a lot of effort into building complex characters, which might be his most effective narrative skill.
Clearly, he is quite obsessed with avoiding repetition as he strives to reinvent his authorial practice with each work. Oddly, this struggle to constantly prove his technical versatility is what makes me a bit suspicious about him – he seems to care too much about his self-representation as an author. Perhaps the most Barnesian feature of his text is his insistence on proving how exceptionally well he can write. For me, it is this insistence on not being Barnesian that is the most Barnesian. I might be wrong, maybe I am just really fond of this conceit, because I would like to sound original and I do not have anything else to say. But do not get me wrong: he does write exceptionally well, in fact, his writing is annoyingly close to perfection.
So maybe I am just jealous when I say that I find his prose to be too polished and too sophisticated, which I could happily overlook if his ideas were more daring, subversive, or audacious. Again, I do not question their originality, but they are a little bit soft, a bit too well-mannered. If we talk about contemporary British writers, then I miss the kind of rawness in the works of Barnes that I truly appreciate in those of McEwan, Fischer, or Amis. Again, maybe I am the one to be blamed. We will see.

Miklós Mikecz

You know you are reading a Barnesian novel when even under baleful scrutiny you fail to find major flaws. Barnes's novels draw our attention to trivialities of life, under which he uncovers the most dazzling problems of human existence. The manner he approaches and elaborates these issues, varying from the irretrievability of the past to animal rights, is subtle and yet flies in the face of literary, historical, at times psychological conventions. His heterogeneous style and playful use and abuse of literary forms enable him to discuss the enquiries of the modernist tradition in a different light, thus postmodernist and modernist features intermingle in his works. His idiosyncratic use of suspense never ceases to test his readers' dedication, and his irony may stay hidden from those who are less well-versed in his writings. The milestones of his enquiry in his earlier works are art, religion and love, whereas his recent works, which are less playful compared to his early ones, directly face passing, remorse, death and mourning. The two phases interlink inasmuch as both seek to unveil the hopelessness and despair of our own existence and soothe the pain of uncertainty, which may derive from our inherently fragmented world of memory, language, or knowledge. Barnes's treatment of existential and moral questions is not prescriptive; the answers to these questions are not implicit in his works. However, in my reading some novels show a suppressed desire to reconstruct some grounds for moral and ethical values.

Eszter Tory

I've always considered people who claim to have a first memory of Julian Barnes slightly suspicious. Hearing his name at the university as an author famous for his irony, for instance. How do I know if it isn't just a projection of my present understanding of Barnes? Or what if it was Barth and I confuse the names of two writers of ironic fiction? In the long run – and what is our past if not a sweaty and disgraceful marathon – first memories are either lies or illusions. Now, if I can't recall when my involvement with his oeuvre started, does that mean it will never end? Will I never get rid of him?

This is how I imagine a paragraph in a book by Barnes. It is easier to write a parody of his texts than a description – I can't find features I would consider distinctly Barnesian, uncharacteristic of every other writer. Still, most of the time when I open a Barnes novel, I feel that the voice is recognizable. The unique quality of his prose, then – if there is such a thing as unique in the postmodern age – must lie in the specific mixture of some recurring motifs and narrative devices. The components of this mixture include (but are not limited to):

The voice of an essayist. A voice that can make effortless transitions from "traditional" storytelling to a mini-essay on the irretrievability of the past, to a discussion of Géricault's *The Raft of the Medusa*, or to some other non-novelistic prose form.

Puzzle games. Some of his novels are built of parts which stand in contrast to each other, or the connection between them is not apparent, and the process of reading is led by the desire to find the implicit connection. (This level of uncertainty might contribute to the feeling that Barnes can be best described by the term ironic, though – strictly speaking – it is not irony if the parts are only in an ambiguous relation, rather than truly negating each other.)

Autobiographical elements. Especially in connection to marriage and infidelity. Interestingly enough, in most cases they are not found in the metafictional paragraphs but rather on the diegetic level (in the dialogues and monologues of the characters).

Péter Tamás

Barnesian, a term coined by the so-called Barnesian Eights, a group of Hungarian PhD students active at the beginning of the 21st century, attempts to define the characteristic qualities of the well-known British author Julian Barnes's (1946–) fiction. After much heated debate and discussion, the group agreed that the term covers such diverse aspects of the writer's fiction as the linguistic, the structural and the thematic. While from a linguistic point of view the term has been accepted as one referring to the conspicuous meta-thematization of the problematic relationship between signifier and signified, there has been considerable controversy over the use of the term from a structural point of view. Although the members all agreed that the use of paratextual elements (titles, episode as well as chapter headings) and parallel narratives are to be considered as essential characteristics of Barnes's works as the primary means of signalling a multiplicity of viewpoints and versions of truth/reality, a consensus concerning the use and even the existence of the narrative strategy of generating suspense in Barnes's oeuvre has not yet been reached. In Barnes's works suspense can be considered as a narrative technique which, strengthened by the reader's expectations that are constantly tested, justified or subverted, represents in a miniature and on a (semi-)fictional level the ways in which ontological and epistemological questions are investigated by real, flesh-and-blood people. As a result of the fact that Barnes's fiction is, to a large extent, reader responsible, the effect of his use of this strategy may vary from reader to reader (resulting possibly even in boredom or frustration). From a thematic point of view, the term Barnesian denotes a wide variety of topics, such as personal identity and memory, national identity and cultural memory, the definition of success, the question of responsibility, the decline of religion and the loss of faith as well as a constant search for the unattainable as a substitute for religion, the inadequacy of language and art as possible means of representing reality, and the irretrievability of the past.
What happened to the Barnesian Eights is not recorded.

Janina Vesztergom

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The essays in this volume were written on Julian Barnes's works by PhD students from Hungary and a guest contributor from Poland, all specializing in Modern English and American literature. Their contextualisations of Barnes's novels within literary theory, narratology, Lacanian subject formation, the human quest for meaning or human-animal encounters, as well as their more playful attempts at defining the Barnesian text, are a tribute to Julian Barnes's oeuvre and the inspiration his works provide. The essays are arranged around the key concepts of Abstraction, Anxiety and Ascendance, and they prove that students will respond to literature with a developing maturity and with an enthusiasm for the creative spark, whether it comes from their readings of literature, their readings in theory or their discussions of all of the above.